Commentary

April 2008

Re-rethinking Iraq

Nothing Succeeds Like Success
Victor Davis Hanson

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Obama's War
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The God of the Gaps
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Roughnecking It
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Free the Piano Player
Terry Teachout

Books in Review
Carol Iannone • Ted R. Bromund • Ben Wildavsky
Daniel Johnson • David Billet

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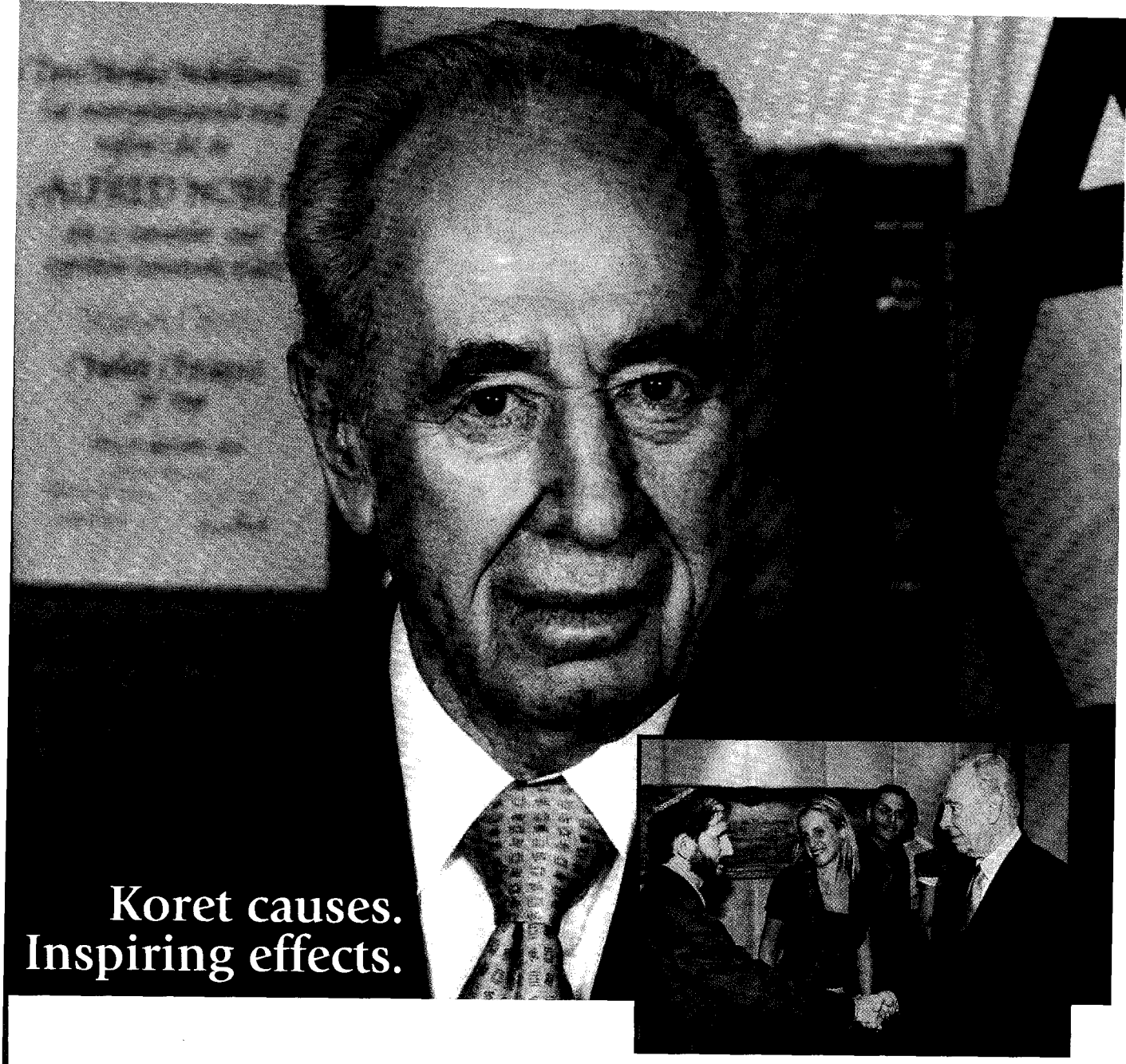

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Commentary

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Commentary
April 2008

Letters from Readers

India Watch

To the Editor:

Sadanand Dhume has done an excellent job updating the status of the often complex relationship between India and the U.S, and he gives reason to believe that the countries' shared democratic values will bring them closer in the coming years ["Is India an Ally?," January].

Politically, however, the key question is what each country seeks from the other. India's economy may come to equal America's in size by 2050, but India will never be a serious contender as a "global superpower" the way Great Britain used to be or China aspires to be. India is basically a mercantile nation that has no designs on a grand partnership with any military power other than for protecting its own domain. For two millennia India was invaded, scavenged, colonized, and broken up, only to rise again without any heightened sense of nationalism or interest in influencing geopolitics.

Americans should not expect India to be a reliable ally if that means linking up in the global chess game of superpower diplomacy. India may acquire or develop sophisticated weapons systems, including nuclear-tipped intercontinental ballistic missiles, but historically its outlook has never gone beyond its own neighborhood, where it expects to be treated as the prime regional power. Indeed, the friction between the U.S. and India in the past was driven by America's attempts to play "zero-sum games" in the Indian subcontinent.

There is talk today of India serving as a counterweight to China; this, in my view, is futile. Nor should one look to India to settle America's political differences with Iran. These two civilizations have been dealing with each other long before most Western nations even existed, and it is unrealistic to expect that their relationship would evaporate because that is the "right thing to do" at the moment.

If, on the other hand, the effort is about promoting commerce, providing aid to poorer countries, advancing democracy and the rule of law, and working multilaterally to reduce global threats ranging from weapons of mass destruction to terrorism to emerging biological challenges, I believe the U.S. will find a willing ally in India.

Vijay K. Sazawal
Indo-American Kashmir Forum
Potomac, Maryland

To the Editor:

Sadanand Dhume is right to ask whether Washington's new love affair with New Delhi is premature, given India's history of "non-alignment," its lingering post-colonial sensibilities, and its inability (to date) to take advantage of the Bush administration's generous civilian nuclear deal. Should Manmohan Singh's government ultimately fail to deliver its end of the nuclear bargain, the next occupant of the White House will think twice before investing much new political capital in the U.S.-India relationship.

Mr. Dhume should also be commended for dispensing with the notion that India is immune to Islamist extremism because of the quality of its democratic institutions. If the smallest fraction of India's Muslim minority views terrorism as a legitimate political tool, India will face a heightened security threat from transnational Islamist groups. But even though India's Muslim community is in fact more prone to radicalization than boosters like Thomas Friedman are willing to admit, Mr. Dhume overstates its political power, particularly in the realm of foreign policy. It is hard to discern the "enormous influence" of Muslim vot-

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ers in New Delhi's policies toward Israel and the United States, or even, for that matter, toward Iran. In each instance, perceived national interests—military, political, and economic—weigh more heavily.

Nor are India's socialists quite the menace Mr. Dhume identifies them as. The leftism of intellectuals like Arundhati Roy and the Left Front parties that have temporarily stalled the U.S.-India nuclear deal is actually losing its popular appeal and its ideological coherence in the face of India's growing economy. Just as in neighboring China, the ruling "Communists" in Indian states like West Bengal have essentially dumped the economic policies of the past in order to court foreign investment and pursue rapid growth.

It is true—and unfortunate—that New Delhi's more ideologically driven leftists have stymied Prime Minister Singh's latest efforts at economic reform. But this fact says more about the weakness of his Congress party than about the Communists' strength. Today the defining dynamic of Indian politics is the decay of Congress and the emergence of regional parties. In this devolution of electoral power, the leftists have maximized their limited leverage by playing between the seams of the governing coalition and the opposition led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). But the Left Front's tactical maneuvers, however successful in the near term, are unlikely to translate into lasting gains.

In sum, the roadblocks to India's continued ascent (and the ascent of the U.S.-India partnership) are less likely to be ideological or religious, as Mr. Dhume argues, than structural. Weak local and national institutions have compromised India's capacity to move ahead with economic reforms and ambitious foreign-policy undertakings. For an aspiring global power, India has thus far underinvested in the tools required to support world-class policymaking, such as higher education in the social sciences, research centers, and a robust, highly trained foreign service.

DANIEL MARKEY
Council on Foreign Relations
Washington, D.C.

TO THE EDITOR:

Sadanand Dhume's cogent and timely essay is a useful corrective to a certain irrational exuberance about India's growth prospects and its supposed willingness to cast its lot with the United States after years of pursuing pseudo-socialist economic policies and "non-aligned" foreign policies. His discussion of the politics of India's Muslim minority is refreshingly forthright. Still, I would note a few instances in which he overstates his case.

While Mr. Dhume is correct that India still suffers from a plethora of economic woes, including endemic poverty, the statistics he cites tell only part of the story. The main story is that India's fitful embrace of a market-oriented strategy of economic growth has contributed to a dramatic reduction in both urban and rural poverty. In 1991, close to 33 percent of the population was below the official poverty line. Today that figure has declined to 26 percent. When one considers that the national population has grown in the same period from 850 million to 1.3 billion, the achievement is nothing short of stunning. Sustained economic growth, which now hovers at around 9 percent, coupled with investment in public health and primary education, could contribute to still more rapid alleviation of poverty.

At another level, Mr. Dhume overstates the political influence of left-wing Indian intellectuals. To be sure, many of them hold Luddite views of industrialization, remain viscerally anti-American, and are given to political bombast. But they command a small, declining audience within India, and are more likely to win accolades among fashionably left-wing faculty of elite American universities than among the Indian electorate. (Needless to say, their disdain for America generally stops short of refusing lucrative fellowships on American campuses.)

Mr. Dhume also fails adequately to appreciate the sea change that has come about in India's foreign policy. Even though the BJP and the Communists have placed the Indo-U.S. civilian nuclear deal in jeopardy, U.S.-India relations are better today than they have been in the past 60 years. The two countries now share significant political, economic, and diplomatic interests. Even feckless American support for the duplicitous Musharraf regime in Pakistan has not undermined this.

In this context, Mr. Dhume's criticism of India's highly calibrated relationship with Iran is off the mark, the reprehensible Ahmadinejad notwithstanding. Contrary to his assessment, India's reasons for engaging Iran are strictly pragmatic. Shiite Iran serves as a counterweight to Sunni Pakistan, is a major supplier of natural gas, and helps ensure the political quiescence of India's substantial Shiite community. As Indian policymakers are wont to underscore, Washington for its part has few qualms about maintaining a robust relationship with Saudi Arabia, a state known for populist anti-Americanism and unremitting hostility toward Israel.

SUMIT GANGULY
Indiana University
Bloomington, Indiana

TO THE EDITOR:

Sadanand Dhume gets a number of things squarely right. India's economic progress has been overhyped (though largely by Western observers who, having caught up with the China story too late, overtook the India story too early), and by no means is it at the cusp of economic superpowerdom. If India plays its cards right, by the middle of the century its people will lead the lives of citizens in an emergent middle-rich country.

Mr. Dhume is also right to raise the question of radical Islam's reach in India. The columnist Thomas Friedman and President Bush have inadvertently done India a disservice by praising it as a country of "150 million Muslims, not one of whom is a member of al Qaeda." Enough individual Indian Muslims outside Jammu and Kashmir have been identified as members of or sympathizers with Lashkar-e-Toiba, al Qaeda's first cousin, and recent investigations into bombings in Glasgow and Barcelona have revealed that Indian Muslims are not im-

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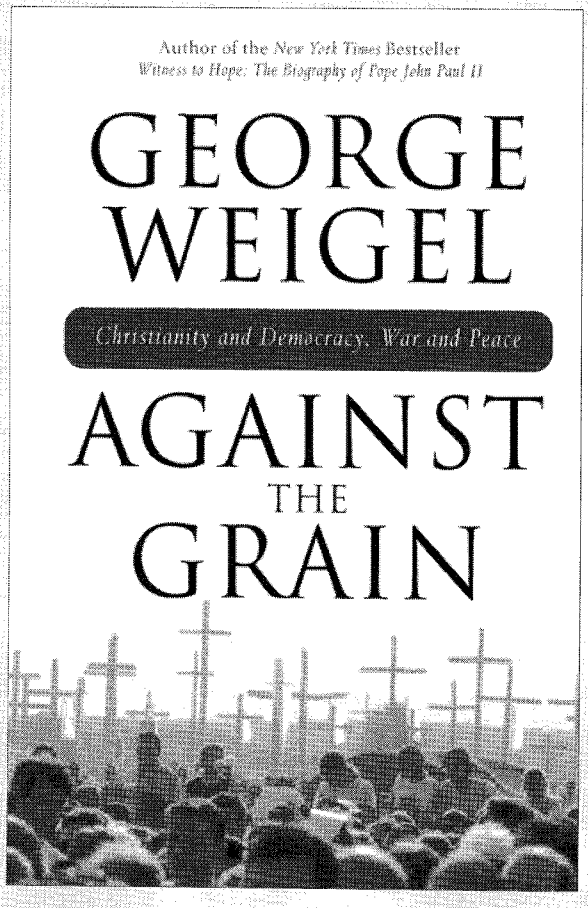
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—David Novak, J. Richard and Dorothy Shiff Professor of Jewish Studies, University of Toronto

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mune to the toxic appeal of international jihad. When Westerners downplay this, they only encourage those in Indian politics who prefer to ignore the problem.

I part company with Mr. Dhume, however, on a number of points. Contrary to what he suggests, we should not expect India to identify absolutely with America's foreign policy. The present world environment is very different from the black-and-white bipolarity of the cold war, when an alliance meant absolute conformity. Nor is the sort of big-bang economic deregulation that many former East-bloc countries have been comfortable with necessarily the right template for Indian society.

Next, analysts in Washington are often remarkably (or deliberately) ignorant of the interplay between India's domestic politics and its foreign policy. Mr. Dhume, for his part, seems to speak of a federal government that is an omnipotent monolith with complete functional autonomy. In truth, the government in New Delhi is a coalition of often conflicting political forces. A sweeping question like "Is India an ally?" makes little sense with respect to India's heterogeneous polity. It would be more prudent to ask: "Which Indian constituencies/parties/states are allies?"

Between India's white-collar middle class and its younger political leaders—who, over the coming years, are likely to succeed the old-timers that are (in Mr. Dhume's phrase) "tethered to the bullock cart"—America is not without allies. Yet the U.S. State Department confines its overtures to the foreign-service bureaucracy and punditocracy in New Delhi, and snubs genuine allies—like Narendra Modi, chief minister of Gujarat—who share America's ideas about security and economics.

Finally, let us not be too hasty with history's timetable. Between the Spanish-American War and Pearl Harbor, the United States took 50 years to decide whether it was isolationist or interventionist, comfortable behind its twin moats—tethered, as it were, to the Pony Express—or a global superpower. Give India at least half that time.

ASHOK MALIK
The Indian Express
New Delhi, India

TO THE EDITOR:

Sadanand Dhume writes: "Until India is able to view itself and its history dispassionately, [and] reject the twin failures of socialism and non-alignment, . . . it will likely remain an underachiever."

An opportunity for such a demonstration has arrived. In January, India's supreme court ordered the government to respond to a petition questioning the propriety of the word "socialist" in the preamble of the national constitution.

As B.R. Ambedkar, one

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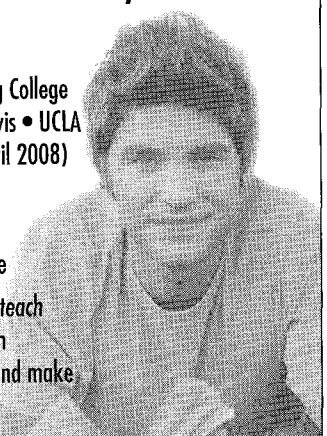

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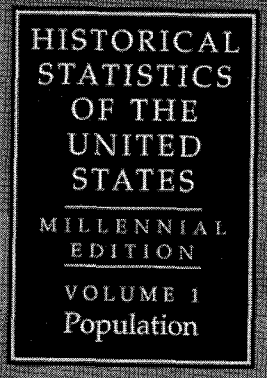

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of India's founding fathers, wrote in 1948:

> [How] society should be organized in its social and economic side are matters which must be decided by the people themselves according to time and circumstances. It cannot be laid down in the constitution itself, because that is destroying democracy altogether. . . . It is perfectly possible . . . for thinking people to devise some other form . . . which might be better than the socialist organization.

The Constituent Assembly agreed with Ambedkar, and the Indian people chose to call themselves a "sovereign, democratic republic." But Indira Gandhi amended the constitution in the mid-1970's during the Emergency, and inserted the "socialist" clause.

Appearing for the petitioners earlier this month, Fali Nariman also asked the court to do away with the socialist vow that is required of political parties by the Election Commission. "It is hypocritical to say that you believe in it when you don't," he said. "One can always have a political party that has capitalism as its intent, and why not?" The bench, headed by Chief Justice K.G. Balakrishnan, raised the following question: "Why do you define socialism in the narrow sense, as the Communists do? . . . Why don't you go by the broader definition, . . . which mandates that the state ensure social-welfare measures for all citizens?"

The answer, of course, is that we must use words in a clear and precise way. Ever since Marx, "socialism" has meant the "public ownership of the means of production." Most Indians do not subscribe to this ideology anymore. Jawaharlal Nehru's intentions were good when he set out to establish socialism in the 1950's, but the results were anything but. The poor suffered disproportionately as the state forcibly acquired farmland. State control of industry brought "License Raj," a system of patronage that utterly corrupted Indian society.

The recent challenge in the supreme court presents an opportunity for India's rulers to come forth and publicly acknowledge some of the mistakes of our past. Until we do that, we will indeed continue to perform below our potential.

GURCHARAN DAS
New Delhi, India

SADANAND DHUME writes:

Since I have no profound argument with my distinguished correspondents on the big picture—it is agreed that India's economy and the India-U.S. relationship are in better shape than ever before—I am left in the happy position of quibbling over details.

Where I depart most sharply from the majority view of India-watchers is on the question of New Delhi's relationship with Tehran.

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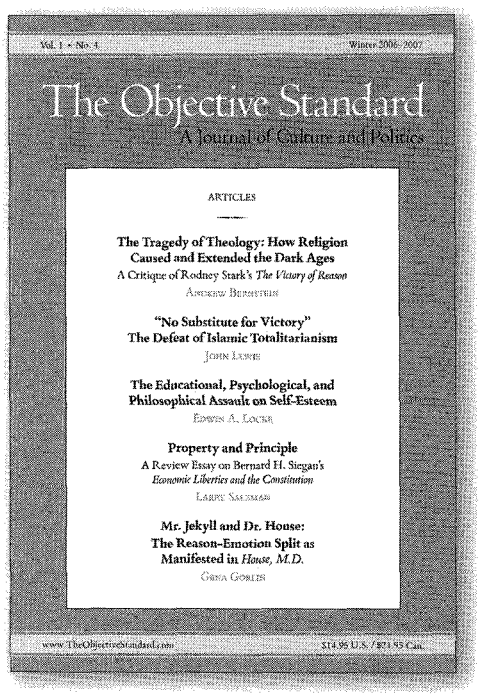
BY JOHN DAVID LEWIS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ARTICLES
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A Critique of Rodney Stark's The Victory of Reason
ANDREW BERNSTEIN
"No Substitute for Victory" The Defeat of Islamic Totalitarianism
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In the . . . years since 9/11, the motivations behind the Islamic attacks have not been suppressed—and this is the real failure of these policies. The number of particular attacks is not the measure of success or failure. The Islamic Totalitarians remain physically intact, spiritually committed, and politically empowered. The Islamic Totalitarian movement remains—distributed, without the strong central command Al Qaeda once had, but still energized—and it appears like hidden gushers, the jihad bursting forth in seemingly random places by internal pressure from an underground stream. Our acceptance of pragmatism, the policy of short-range trial and error that rejects principles on principle—and altruism, the morality of self-sacrifice—left no other result possible.

The reason for this failure is that every one of the ideas we used to evaluate our options is wrong. In every case, the opposite of today's "conventional wisdom" is true.

- A strong offense does not create new enemies; it defeats existing foes. Were this not so, we would be fighting German and Japanese suicide bombers today, while North Korea—undefeated by America—would be peaceful, prosperous, and free.
- Poverty is not the "root cause" of wars. If it were, poor Mexicans would be attacking America, not begging for jobs at Wal-Mart.
- Democracy is not a route to freedom—not for the Greeks who voted to kill Socrates, nor for the Romans who acclaimed Caesar, nor for the Germans who elected Hitler.
- A culture of slavery and suicide is not equal to a culture of freedom and prosperity—not for those who value life.
- The world is not a flux of contradictions, in which principles do not work. If it were, gravity would not hold, vaccinations would not work, and one would not have a right to one's life.
- Being moral does not mean sacrificing for others. It means accepting the American principle of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"—and living for one's own sake.

History is clear: All-out force against fanatical killers is both practical and moral. It led us to our two most important foreign policy successes—the defeats of Germany and Japan in 1945—and to the permanent peace with those nations that we take for granted today. Such a course was practical and moral then, and it is practical and moral now—an affirmation, and a defense, of life and civilization. . . .

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Vijay K. Sazawal's point about the deep civilizational ties between India and Iran and Sumit Ganguly's observation that Indian policy is driven more by realpolitik than by domestic political considerations have much to commend them. It is a fact that India's cultural, linguistic, and economic links with Iran date back to antiquity. The importance of Iran's role as a Shiite power on Pakistan's western border, and its willingness to give India the access to Afghanistan and central Asia that Islamabad denies, should not be underestimated.

The thrust of my argument, however, was not to dismiss legitimate Indian interests but to point out that these make India a much less reliable partner of the U.S. than it is often considered. No doubt America's failure to halt the global proliferation of Sunni extremism—as embodied by its foremost state sponsors, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan—mirrors India's listless approach to the Shiite extremism represented by the mullahs of Iran. But modern India's compact with Islamic obscurantism, which dates back to Mohandas Gandhi's peculiar call more than 80 years ago to forge Hindu-Muslim unity by protesting the abolition of the Turkish caliphate, makes it unlikely that either Washington or New Delhi will come around to the other's view any time soon. Such fundamental differences do not reliable partners make.

Against this light, it is impossible for me to agree with Daniel Markey's assessment that India's Muslim community has little power in the realm of foreign policy. Why else did India wait until 1992 to establish diplomatic relations with Israel, and why, even today, must their interactions take place away from the public eye? Domestic Muslim sentiment has never been too far from the sights of Indian policymakers, and the capacity of this sentiment to mar the promise of India-U.S. relations remains sadly all too real.

As for the role of leftists in India's public discourse, and by extension in its public policy, Messrs. Markey and Ganguly and Ashok Malik are right to emphasize their declining fortunes, especially among the young. (Mr. Markey's observation about the newfound business sense of West Bengal's Communists is especially apt.) Still, it remains undeniable, as Gurcharan Das has eloquently shown in his classic *India Unbound*, that India has failed to acknowledge fully the price it paid for persisting with socialism for so many decades. When one considers the fractured nature of the country's polity, it is not hard to imagine scenarios in which it could regress to a harmful populism, if not to full-blown statism.

Stem Cells

TO THE EDITOR:

Jay P. Lefkowitz's account of President Bush's deliberations on his embryonic stem-cell-research policy is a valuable contribution to the historical record, but his wholesale charge that the scientific community was morally unserious in *its* deliberations is disappointing ["Stem Cells and the President," January].

If Mr. Lefkowitz has not heard of the sensitivity of scientists to the moral questions raised by the creation and destruction of embryonic cells, it can only be because he has not listened. Contrary to what he suggests, the biologist James Thomson is on record paying heed to the ethical quandaries long before they were supposedly rendered moot by recent scientific discoveries. At least two federal commissions in the 1990's examined the moral dilemmas in detail, hearing testimony from numerous theologians. In 2005, a committee I co-chaired for the National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine issued a report with a whole chapter devoted to the moral status of the human embryo.

An irony of the President's reasoning seems to have eluded Mr. Lefkowitz. He cites an observation of the bioethicist Leon Kass in a crucial White House meeting that if one funds research on stem cells that have *already* been extracted from embryos (as opposed to creating embryos in order to extract their cells), one is "not complicit in their destruction." Had the President actually acted on this dictum, he would have preserved President Clinton's policy, which approved funding for research on embryonic stem-cell lines but not for the derivation of such lines. Instead, President Bush established a policy that, as Mr. Lefkowitz notes, created an arbitrary moral boundary that satisfied neither side of the debate, and left his administration in a "defensive crouch."

Mr. Lefkowitz suggests that the moral debate has been ended by the recent papers on induced pluripotency—i.e., a technique that allows, without the destruction of human embryos, the creation of stem cells that are identical to those taken from embryos. But if he had listened to the scientists who made the discovery, he would have learned that in order to make the technique safe and reliable, embryonic stem-cell lines will still be needed for many years.

JONATHAN D. MORENO
Center for Bioethics
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

TO THE EDITOR:

It was refreshing to learn from Jay P. Lefkowitz that the President's approach to embryonic stem cells was driven by genuine ethical concerns. This is not something that can be said of every participant in the debate. There were many in the pro-choice camp who were eager to use the stem-cell issue as a surrogate in the abortion wars. Until stem cells came on the scene, pro-lifers maintained an advantage in imagery: a mid- or late-term fetus looks very much like a newborn baby. The medical hopes for embryonic stem cells pitted the earliest embryos—microscopic blobs—against articulate, compelling spokesmen of human suffering like the actor Michael J. Fox.

Thus arose a partnership of politicians, eager to tap pro-choice votes, with leading scientists who touted the potential of stem cells to provide new therapies for a wide range of chronic conditions. But the credibility of the scientists' promise may be questioned. For years, we have heard that identifying the mutations re-

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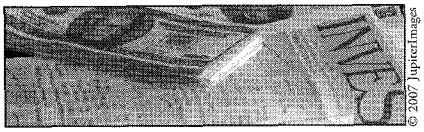
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sponsible for single-gene disorders like cystic fibrosis would lead to a cure; next, that sequencing the human genome would give us the "Book of Life"; then, that gene transfer, which was prematurely misnamed gene "therapy," would cure nearly every disease; and now the wonders of stem cells.

In each case, huge amounts of money from government, industry, and private donors were expended, but they failed to generate cures. The public should know that the leading practical effect of finding the mutations responsible for single-gene disorders has been prenatal diagnosis and elective abortion—hardly what one could call therapy.

KEVIN JON WILLIAMS, M.D.
Wynnewood, Pennsylvania

JAY P. LEFKOWITZ writes:

Jonathan D. Moreno takes umbrage at my remark that the scientific community was not sufficiently sympathetic to the moral problems associated with embryonic stem-cell research. To be sure, many individual scientists—James Thomson is definitely one—have long recognized the tension between the potentially beneficial ends of such research and the manipulation of human embryos that it requires.

But it can fairly be said that the dominant view in the scientific community has been sharply critical of President Bush for allowing "theological" concerns to impede scientific progress. In comments that were widely quoted in the press, the president of the Coalition for the Advancement of Medical Research, a group representing more than 100 medical associations, colleges, scientific societies, and private foundations, stated that "the administration was ignoring science and attempting to silence scientists. . . . There is a moral imperative to help the sick, and the Bush policy flies in the face of that."

Mr. Moreno misconstrues the meaning of Leon Kass's distinction (which President Bush's policy adopted) if he feels it should have led to the preservation of President Clinton's standing policy. The entire basis of Bush's decision was that he did not want taxpayer funds to serve as an inducement for *anyone* to destroy human embryos. Thus, only stem-cell lines that existed prior to the policy's enactment could qualify for federal funding. Clinton's policy allowed the government to look away as stem cells were extracted from embryos by private means; it could then step in to fund research on the newly "existing" lines.

There is certainly power to Kevin Jon Williams's argument that some people have used the stem-cell issue as a proxy for the abortion debate, but that is a charge that can be leveled against the Right as well as the Left. In his criticism of the histrionics of some advocates of embryonic stem-cell research, Dr. Williams neglects to highlight what may be their most ambitious aim, which is to secure federal funding for what is euphemistically called "therapeutic cloning." This refers to a process by which a skin cell from an adult is introduced into a de-nucleated egg in order to produce a cloned embryo whose DNA is identical to that of the donor. Such cloning, it is thought, could lead to the development of tissue and organs that would be available for transplantation into adults without risk of rejection. Of course, it also entails creating human life in a laboratory as a mere instrument—an ominous precedent indeed.

Art for All?

TO THE EDITOR:

I read Michael J. Lewis's "After the Art Wars" [January] with interest, and would like to offer some clarification on his speculations about the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA).

Mr. Lewis writes that that the NEA has "six separate programs"; in fact, there are fourteen disciplines and seven active National Initiatives in which grants are given. While it is true that congressional reforms stipulate that the NEA must provide funding by way of arts organizations, there still are direct grants to individuals in the categories of literary prose, poetry, and translation, as well as lifetime achievement awards in jazz, folk and traditional arts, and opera. The NEA also manages the nominations for the National Medal of Arts.

In addition, an initiative like Shakespeare in American Communities gives direct support to individual artists through employment. Since its inauguration in 2003, the Shakespeare program has reached more than 1,700 cities and towns across all 50 states, and employed thousands of actors, designers, costumers, and stagehands. More important, it has brought more than a million students into a professional production of live theater.

As for Mr. Lewis's notion that the NEA has been distancing itself from the visual arts, nothing could be farther from the truth. Besides the many direct grants the NEA gives to museums, its American Masterpieces program celebrates the extraordinary evolution of the visual arts in America by way of exhibitions, commissions, and residencies for artists. Beyond that, the agency also administers the Arts and Artifacts Indemnity program of the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities, which by subsidizing insurance costs has made it possible for museum visitors across the country to see important works of art from around the globe.

Finally, Mr. Lewis points with dismay to the fact that the NEA has "set itself the goal of delivering a direct grant to every congressional district." But this is not a matter of politics or of lower standards. It is a matter of democratic fairness—of honoring the mandate to bring the transformative power of art to all Americans.

FELICIA K. KNIGHT
National Endowment for the Arts
Washington, D.C.

TO THE EDITOR:

Although there were many forces that merged to create the perfect storm of the NEA's culture wars in the 1990's, I agree with Michael Lewis's general line of argument. The notion, common in the 80's, that the NEA had the responsibility and the ability to advance a curatorial vision of "cutting-edge" art was politically naive. (I

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develop this point in some detail in a forthcoming book, *Arts, Inc.*) Moreover, the NEA was inattentive to where its money went—in 1992, nearly a third of grant funds were directed to New York state.

For decades the agency had been criticized by Congress on these and other matters, and had avoided budgetary punishment only because it was protected by a handful of powerful leaders on the Democratic side. Once that inch-wide, mile-deep support was swept away in the Republican rout of 1994, the Endowment took a pretty big fall. When I was chairman (1998-2001), we were able to restore congressional support and get the NEA budget growing again, but we did not do so by funding politically- or sexually-charged performance art; instead, we relied on our Challenge America Initiative and its popular community-arts grants.

There is a place for a National Endowment for the Arts—even an expanded one—but the agency needs to operate out of a solid vision of the cultural mainstream, and it must remain aware of how to distribute money fairly in a democracy.

BILL IVEY
Vanderbilt University
Nashville, Tennessee

TO THE EDITOR:

Michael J. Lewis writes:

> In these early years [in the 1960's], the grant recipients were eminently deserving. They included the Martha Graham dance company; Tony Smith, a minimalist sculptor; Edward Ruscha, a Pop artist and maker of artists' books; and Daniel Flavin, a pioneer of the use of light as a sculptural material. While the work of the recipients would not be to everyone's taste, they represented an irreproachable selection of promising young artists at a critical moment in their careers.

Later on, Mr. Lewis writes: "A better solution would be a blanket decision to support no contemporary work whatsoever."

Which is it?

PETER PLAGENS
New York City

MICHAEL J. LEWIS writes:

Felicia K. Knight's letter in defense of the NEA, of which she is communications director, catches me in a factual error: the NEA indeed comprises fourteen programs (although there were six at its founding in 1965). And she is right that the NEA has performed laudably in some areas: education is a bright spot, and so is the indemnity program, which comes at a time when insurance premiums have made the borrowing of works of art from Europe virtually unaffordable.

But Felicia Knight inadvertently confirms my point that the art wars of the late 1980's have made the once-ambitious agency into a cautious dispenser of largesse. One can certainly strive for both artistic excellence and breadth of reach, but at a certain point these criteria will come into conflict. In cultivating a rose, one must ultimately give pride of place to one trait, and just as the modern florist has chosen color over scent, so the NEA has chosen to give a "direct grant to every congressional district" (not my words but those of her director).

A vivid example of this conflict between breadth and quality is given by Bill Ivey, who acted with probity and good judgment when he chaired the NEA. But he concedes that it was politically unacceptable for a third of grant funds to go to New York. However, given New York's role as the principal center of American art, it might well be that such a distribution made good sense—just as it would make sense for the French government to favor Paris. I look forward with anticipation to Mr. Ivey's book.

Finally, Peter Plagens believes he has found a contradiction in my suggesting on the one hand that the NEA should not be in the business of underwriting the creation of new works of art while on the other hand acknowledging that early grant recipients were of exceptional merit. But in 1965, when the agency was established, circumstances were unusually favorable for government support of the arts; in particular, the prevailing doctrine of formalism insulated art from explicit political content.

This is no longer the case. As art has expanded its boundaries to become, in many instances, indistinguishable from politics, it cannot ask to be subsidized by citizens of varying political views. Mr. Plagens is a critic of some distinction, and I wish he had let us know his own view of the matter.

The Refugees

TO THE EDITOR:

Hillel Halkin deserves our thanks for another cogent analysis of Israel's strategic quandaries, but I must disagree with him on the way forward for the Jewish state. ["The Peace Planners Strike Again," January].

Mr. Halkin's forthright assessment that "British Mandate Palestine never was and is not today big enough to accommodate both a Jewish and an Arab state" should have been obvious to all from the start, but few dared proclaim it. However, grafting the Palestinian parts of the West Bank onto Jordan, as he proposes, is no solution. The nineteen years (1948-67) in which Jordan ruled that disputed territory did not bring peace or security to either side of the Jordan River.

Mr. Halkin assumes that the alternative—an undivided Israel from the Mediterranean to the Jordan—would be "a romantic form of suicide" for Israel, given the problems associated with absorbing the Palestinians or "expelling" them. But would it?

Mr. Halkin himself reminds us that millions of Greeks were expelled from Turkey in 1921; that millions of Germans were "relocated" from Czechoslovakia and East Prussia in 1945; and that when India and Pakistan were created in 1948, tens of million of Muslims and Hindus fled their ancestral homes, never to return. None of those caught up in such upheavals received international aid or compensation. An enormous exception was made for the Palestinian Arabs; billions of dollars were spent on refugee camps and ser-

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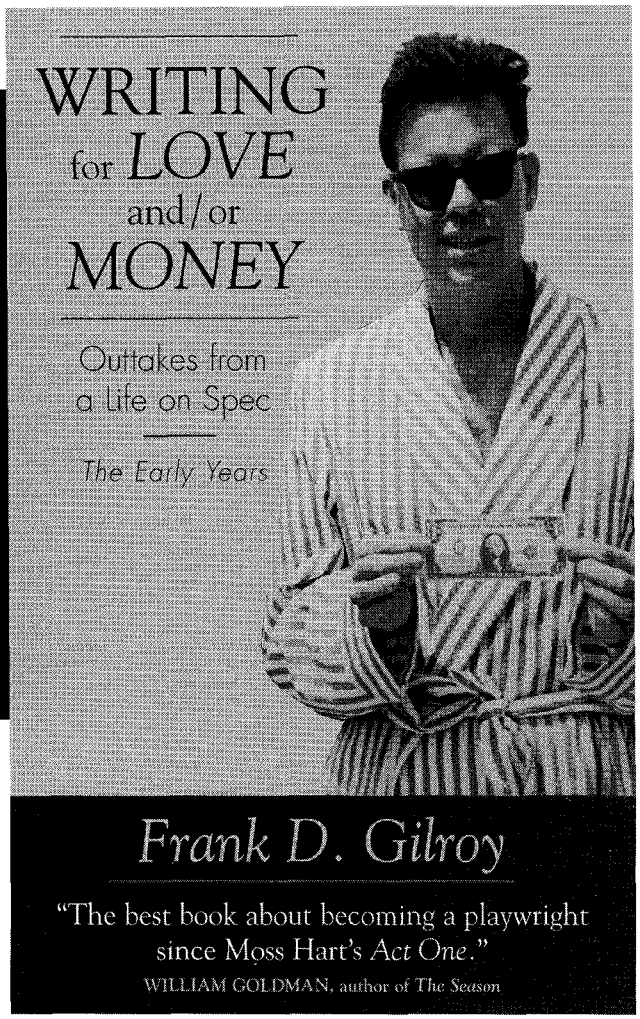

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vices. But rather than bringing peace to the region or a better life for the refugees, this has prevented them from being assimilated and absorbed by the lands to which they fled.

The billions more already earmarked (and to come) can be put to better use than continuing the pursuit of a two-state solution that has brought nothing but misery and bloodshed. They can be used to resettle in Arab lands a sizable majority of the Palestinian Arabs. Generous compensation, coupled with the timed cutoff of future funding for the refugee camps, could constitute an offer that few would be able to resist.

The arguments against such a project will be legion. But no other solution has worked. We know that killing and expulsion, those ancient remedies for intractable differences among peoples, work very well, and that is the pass to which the final breakdown of the two-state solution will surely lead. A well-financed plan for compensated resettlement would be better by far, and infinitely more humane.

HENRY SHERMAN
Miami, Florida

HILLEL HALKIN writes:

Henry Sherman's plan would be a wonderful one except for one thing: it does not have the remotest chance of being accepted.

The idea of resettling Palestinian Arabs in other Arab countries in order to improve the Jewish demographic balance has a long history that goes back to the years of the British Mandate. No Arab countries were interested then; no Arab countries are interested now. These countries have enough problems feeding, educating, and finding work for their own populations, which they are not looking to increase.

In addition, many of them, such as Lebanon and Jordan, which took in the largest number of Palestinian refugees from the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, have their own demographic balances to worry about. Lebanon's Palestinians, many by now third-and-fourth-generation Lebanese-born, have been denied citizenship to this day because nearly all of them are Muslims, and Lebanon's Christians are adamantly opposed to their naturalization.

Moreover, why should the Arab countries lift a finger to help Israel with its demographic balance? All would be happy if Israel disappeared one day, and all know that the higher the ratio of Arabs to Jews in a Jewish state, the greater the chances of this happening.

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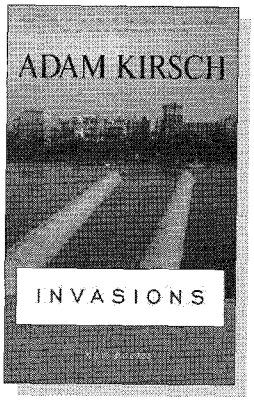

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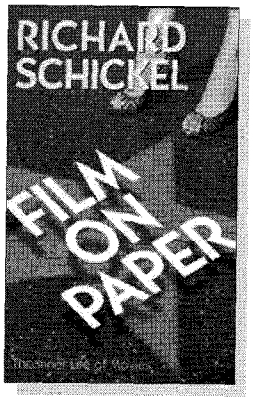

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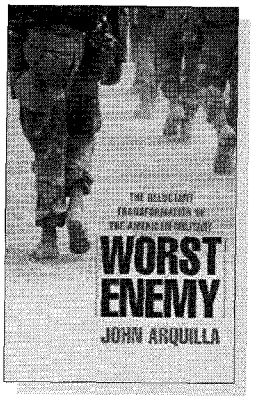

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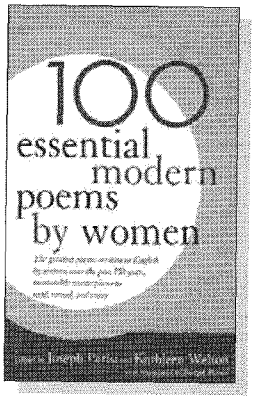

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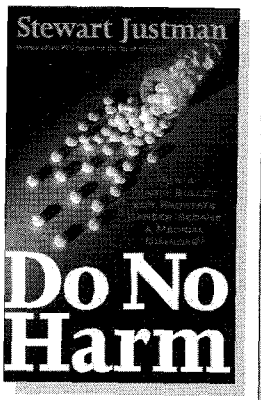

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Commentary
April 2008

Re-rethinking Iraq

Nothing Succeeds Like Success

Victor Davis Hanson

Americans have regularly changed their minds in the midst of their ongoing wars—and not just once, but often. War is a volatile enterprise. Tactics, strategies, and commanders must be sorted out amid death and destruction before the proper combination is found to defeat the enemy. In the meantime, the reasons for going to war, the manner in which the war is fought, and the objectives for which it is waged are constantly being weighed at home against the costs of conducting it. As a result, impatient democracies—and Americans are nothing if not impatient—are liable to suffer alternating fits of unrestrained optimism and utter despair.

This volatility has certainly characterized our current engagement in Iraq, but it has been no less true before. In the early days of the Civil War, a confident North was sure of quick victory in a righteous cause. After the slaughters of 1862 at Shiloh, Antietam, and Frederickburg, the North then fell into collective querulousness and despair. By the summer of 1863, the North was ebullient again as its armies won crushing, near-simultaneous victories at both Gettysburg and Vicksburg. A year later, after the Wilderness, Spotsylvania, and Cold Harbor, Lincoln and all he stood for were reviled. Stalemate or concession seemed imminent—until General Philip Sheridan ran wild in the Shenandoah Valley and William Tecumseh Sherman took Atlanta on September 2, 1864.

Lincoln's war aims were largely the same in April 1865 as they had been in April 1861. It was not his policies *per se* that lost, regained, lost, and once more gained public support but rather the perceived progress, or lack thereof, of Union arms. And these mercurial reactions have likewise been the norm in our later history. In World War II, well after the initial gloom of 1939-42 had disappeared with the turnaround in 1943 and 1944, near-shock set in over the horrendous Allied slaughters at the Bulge and Okinawa—only to be set aside within a matter of months when the war ended victoriously.

In the Korean war, to take another example, Seoul changed hands four times. Harry Truman, who had won support for the deployment of American troops in the summer of 1950 and then lost it with the massive Chinese invasion of December, left office in January 1953 with a 22-percent approval rating. But his successor Dwight Eisenhower, without materially changing American strategy or war aims, mustered fresh support for stabilizing the situation once General Matthew Ridgway had succeeded in restoring an autonomous South Korea below the 38th parallel, and in preventing further Communist aggression.

In the first two years of the Vietnam war (1963-65), the struggle was generally deemed to be es-

Victor Davis Hanson *is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution and the author most recently of* A War Like No Other: How the Athenians and Spartans Fought the Peloponnesian War.

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sential to our national interest and, what is more, winnable. By 1967, however, the war was beginning to be seen as a quagmire; by mid-1968, it had been written off by many as a disaster. Then, five years later, in 1973, it was grudgingly judged to have been settled by the Paris peace accords—before being lost in 1975.

AND IRAQ? Three-quarters of Americans favored the initial decision in October 2002 to remove Saddam Hussein. In the wake of our brilliant three-week victory in April 2003 and the initial, relatively quiet months of the postwar occupation, the public maintained its strong support. This remained the case even after it became clear that we had not found arsenals of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), one of the chief reasons offered by the Bush administration for going to war.

By late 2006, however—after the Abu Ghraib scandal, the pullback from Falluja, the withdrawal of some members of the original coalition, and increased internecine violence between Shiites and Sunnis, and in the face of some 3,000 American combat fatalities—only about a third of Americans still thought the war was worth the price or favored its continuation. By late summer 2007, of the 27 Democratic Senators who had voted to authorize hostilities in October 2002, only one, Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut, was still on record as supporting the effort. Former President Bill Clinton, who in 2002 had boasted, "I don't think it will be a big military problem if we do it," and who reiterated his support in May 2003, announced last year that he had been against the war "from the beginning."

But we appear to have entered lately into still another cycle of re-interpretation, clearly the result of a new array of converging developments. Among these, the successful "surge" of U.S. troops, the appointment of General David Petraeus as senior theater commander, and the tactical switch from counter-terrorism to counter-insurgency are no doubt the most salient. These days, although there is no great public elation at our improved prospects, or appreciation that al Qaeda by its own admission is in disarray in Iraq, we see or hear very little of antiwar groups like Code Pink or the Cindy Sheehan brigades, and none of Hollywood's recent antiwar movies—*Lions for Lambs*, *Redacted*, *Rendition*, *Valley of Elah*—has made a dent at the box office. At the very least, many Americans seem tired of being told that the United States is the culpable party in the war.

As we see improved chances for an eventual U.S. victory and a stabilized Iraq, it is therefore worth returning to the most controversial issues of the war—not in order to re-fight it, but to gain some perspective on the relationship between battlefield developments and perceptions of the worthiness and achievability of American aims.

THE BUSH administration, like Congress in its authorizations of October 2002, advanced many arguments for going into Iraq: Saddam Hussein's possession of WMD, his links with al Qaeda, his genocidal actions at home and abroad, his harboring of terrorists, his non-stop violations of UN mandates and of the accords struck after the first Gulf war from 1991 onward. Of these, we may begin with the first two, the only ones to become issues mired in acrimony.

Upon their arrival in Iraq, U.S. forces found no arsenals of WMD. Accordingly, when the occupation took a deadly turn, a new slogan emerged: "Bush lied, thousands died." The United States, in other words, had gotten itself into a hopeless and vastly destructive war over a nonexistent cause. Yet now that things are improving in Iraq, does that verdict hold up or can we look back and see larger considerations at stake?

The case of Libya offers the most compelling reason to view the question afresh. Only upon our invasion of Iraq did we learn about Libya's own nuclear-weapons programs, the existence and dangerous extent of which had not been previously discovered by our intelligence services. Instead, we learned about them thanks to Muammar Qaddafi's sudden promise to give them up. Was Qaddafi's precipitous action the consequence, as diplomats boasted, of a longstanding Western effort to isolate Libya diplomatically and economically, or was it rather the consequence of the recent and unexpected demonstration of victorious American might in Iraq? The timing of the announcement—in December 2003, a week after the much-photographed capture of a haggard and bedraggled Saddam Hussein—suggests the latter.

Nor was this the only coincidence of timing. Take the case of Iran, which, according to the National Intelligence Estimate of 2007, may have halted elements of its own nuclear-weapons program in the fall of 2003. If that is true—the accuracy of the NIE as a whole is highly questionable—we have here another instance of the inhibiting effect of vigorous American action on the nuclear ambitions of rogue states.

This is not to suggest that the Iraq war was fought in order to pressure Libya and Iran into desisting from their quest for WMD. But had we *not*

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gone into Iraq, it is all too easy to envision a scenario in which Libya and Iran would now be proceeding to process weapons-grade uranium and we would still be as unsure about Iraq itself as we and the international community had been throughout the 1990's. And this is to say nothing of a related development in Pakistan—where, at almost the same moment as Saddam's capture, Dr. A.Q. Khan was abruptly detained and subsequently confessed to having been involved in the covert international proliferation of nuclear-weapons technology to Libya, Iran, and North Korea.

In this connection, we might also pause to consider another "lesson" of Iraq that only yesterday was thought to have been resolved for all time. In the heyday following the quick removal of the Taliban and preceding the invasion of Iraq, the Bush administration released a National Security Strategy document embracing the doctrine of preemptive war against suspected enemies, especially those with the capability of developing WMD. "We will not wait," George Bush declared in his March 6, 2003 address to the nation, "to see what terrorists or terrorist states will do."

But then, after we failed to find WMD in Iraq, and the violence in that country escalated, preemption, too, was added to the growing indictment sheet of the administration's supposed record of arrogance and incompetence. Does that charge, in light of where we are today, still stand?

Retrospectively, the legitimacy of preemption can be confirmed (if not precisely in the terms its backers expected) by the Libyan announcement, the possible cessation of enrichment in Iran, and the detention of A.Q. Khan. All three are examples of changes in the balance of power that did not require the direct application of preemptive American force but were the results of its preemptive application elsewhere.

Prospectively, as we ponder Iran's ongoing violations of the international inspection regime and the failure of diplomatic efforts to prevent Tehran from acquiring nuclear weapons, preemption seems to have become once again thinkable, winning to its side such unlikely converts as French President Nicolas Sarkozy and NATO ministers who recently declared their own willingness to embrace preemptive strategies, including nuclear options, against states that threaten NATO members with state-sponsored terror and deadly new weapons. And as for Pakistan, which already has a sizable nuclear arsenal, political figures as diverse as Barack Obama and Mike Huckabee have suggested preemptive incursions in order to find Osama bin Laden and his lieutenants—a proposal scarcely conceivable just two years ago when our "unnecessary preemptive war" in Iraq had allegedly landed us in a quagmire.

Which brings us back to the second highly controversial reason adduced for the war in Iraq—namely, the existence of links between Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden. A loose affinity between the two men was widely accepted as canonical in late 2002. In the words of the joint congressional authorization, bin Laden's operatives were "known to be in Iraq," and Senator Hillary Clinton confirmed that "intelligence reports show that Saddam Hussein . . . has given aid, comfort, and sanctuary to terrorists, including al-Qaeda members." Buttressing this assurance were a number of established facts: Saddam's knowledge of or assistance to the al-Qaeda affiliate Ansar al-Islam in Kurdistan; the presence in Baghdad of Abdul Rahman Yasin, one of the architects of the 1993 attack on the World Trade Center; and the flight to Iraq of one of bin Laden's followers, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, after the defeat of the Taliban in Afghanistan.

But when intra-Iraq violence increased in 2004-5, and when the 9/11 commission found no evidence of formal cooperation between al Qaeda and Saddam, the "link" was pronounced another fabrication—more proof that our presence in Iraq had nothing to do with defeating the people who had killed thousands of Americans on September 11. Instead, the new narrative had it that, simply by being in Iraq, we had *created* an army of terrorists who would have otherwise never existed or never have been drawn there.

Today, the issue is being slowly re-framed. True, there may never have been a formal working relationship between Saddam and al Qaeda, but some natural affinity there was. Certainly, once Saddam's Baathist remnant found itself without an army, it had no difficulty looking to al Qaeda to import one post-haste. Since 2003, al-Qaeda fighters have operated in conjunction with the Saddamist insurgents. Only now, and with the help of former Baathist and Sunni extremists whom we have persuaded to turn against their erstwhile allies, are American soldiers on the verge of inflicting a thorough defeat on al Qaeda in Iraq—a development with major strategic implications for the war against Islamic terrorists and one, moreover, that is taking place, as originally intended, at a safe distance from our own shores.

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STILL ANOTHER point of reexamination relates to the status and image of the U.S. military. If the spectacular three-week victory over Saddam in 2003 led to a kind of temporary triumphalism, the four years of hard fighting, long rotations, and casualties that followed it prompted a deep-seated revisionist pessimism. Our military was said to be worn out, poorly led, and prone to crimes like Abu Ghraib and the Haditha "massacres." The Pentagon was indicted as having been fatally blindsided by the ingenuity and ferocity of enemy attacks. Enlistments were said to be to be falling below manpower targets, with no end in sight.

Today's perception is once again different. Thanks to the success of our counter-insurgency tactics and the consequent drop in violence—during 2007, ethnic fighting in Baghdad decreased by over 90 percent—ordinary Americans are beginning to grasp that our military forces, and especially the Army and Marine corps, are within sight of accomplishing a task that is still confidently pronounced impossible by some prominent public figures.

As of December 2007, enlistments in the four services have exceeded manpower goals, and entirely new combat brigades are being created. Our officers and their troops, however weary they may be from repeated tours, are now acknowledged to be the world's most sophisticated practitioners of counter-insurgency warfare. Their competence is on display not only in Iraq but also in Afghanistan, where American veterans of the Iraq war have proved far more adroit against the Taliban than their unseasoned NATO allies. Like the emergence of Sherman's Army of the West in the autumn of 1864, which renewed the North's faith in its military prowess and in the wisdom of Lincoln's war planners, the Petraeus command in Iraq has prompted a new appreciation of our military's talents.

What about troop deployments, an issue much agitated among supporters of the war no less than among opponents? If the 2003 lightning strike on Saddam was tendered as confirmation of the efficacy of Donald Rumsfeld's "revolution in military affairs," the subsequent bloody occupation was taken as a rebuke not just to the Rumsfeld doctrine, but also to the entire notion of an expeditionary war conducted with a small local footprint. For much of 2004, former generals, antiwar politicians, and some proponents of the war insisted that too few troops had been committed in 2003 and far too few allotted for the subsequent occupation. Initial calls for a corrective surge in 2004, voiced by stalwarts like John McCain, stipulated reinforcements in numbers ranging from 80,000 to 100,000 troops. But by mid-2007 a much smaller compromise figure of 30,000 was reached—the maximum number considered to be politically palatable, sufficient to support a change in tactics, and, given other American military deployments around the globe, just barely doable.

So we have gone from a general feeling in 2003 that 200,000 was the right number to execute our brilliant defeat of Saddam Hussein, to a subsequent consensus that it was veritable insanity to commit a mere 150,000 troops to pacify a country of 26 million, to an acknowledgment that, after four years of fighting, a surge to 160,000 was large enough. The point is hardly to suggest there is no correct answer to the question of numbers or that manpower needs do not change with the pulse of battle, but rather, in the light of today's good news, to cast doubt on the fiercely held revisionist orthodoxy of 2004-06 that the total size of the needed deployment of American occupiers lay in several hundreds of thousands.

FINALLY, THERE is the future. As early as April 2003, some observers had begun to speak of an unstoppable American juggernaut, which, having already destroyed two extremist regimes in Afghanistan and Iraq, and on the brink of establishing stable reform governments in those countries, could now quickly shift its attention to such other terrorist-sponsoring states as Syria and Iran.

This confidence, dashed by the insurgency and sectarian strife in Iraq, was soon supplanted by a new conventional wisdom. Far from being able to decapitate other enemy nations, it was said, we had further empowered them. Iran in particular, its regional ambitions no longer checked by Saddam, and newly emboldened by perceived American setbacks, was declared the real "winner" of our folly, carving out a rump Shiite state in southern Iraq, boldly exporting jihadists all over the region from Iraq to Lebanon, and on the verge of acquiring the bomb. Syria under Bashar Assad was proceeding methodically to choke Lebanon to death.

Now all this has begun to be rethought once more. By the end of 2007, Moqtada al-Sadr, the chief local surrogate of the Ayatollahs, evidently sensing a change in the local balance of power, had prudently withdrawn from his violent anti-American and anti-Sunni activity. Meanwhile, the Shiite-dominated government in Baghdad was beginning to restore domestic funding to Sunni communities in Anbar province and to be inching toward a more genuinely representative system. Perhaps, it was being whispered, Iraqi Shiites valued their Iraqi

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and Arab identity over their sectarian Shiite allegiance after all, and might be prepared to resist Iranian encroachments on their sovereignty. Regionally, too, there have been signs, however halting and uncertain, of a growing Arab desire to contain Iran. Could it be that, provided the nuclear threat can be disposed of, the long-running grip of Khomeinism might be better challenged in the landscape of a post-Saddam Iraq?

So far, none of these gradual reversals of opinion has affected overall judgments of the Bush administration, whose approval ratings, according to most polls, still hover around 35 percent. This continued unpopularity has prompted some among the President's supporters to compare his tenure with that of Harry Truman, who as we have seen exited office in 1953 with even lower ratings. Only later, with the dramatic turnabout in Korea and the gradual emergence of a successful South Korea, did Truman achieve his lasting reputation as the executor of the cold-war strategy of containment and a hugely consequential President.

Such positive revisionism can take years to develop. Assessments from the battlefield must be digested, partisan distortions rectified, and volatile news cycles balanced by the more measured perspective that comes only with time.

The optimism of 2003, it is good to remember, was itself not just a product of the spectacular removal of Saddam and the Taliban, but a dividend of other successful interventions dating back decades: Grenada, Panama, the first Gulf war, the successful Balkan bombing campaign against Slobodan Milosevic, and the rapid removal of the Taliban from power in Afghanistan. By the turn of the millennium, an almost antiseptic notion of American war-making had been created in the public mind. In turn, the bitterness over Iraq, whose symptoms peaked last year in the attempt by congressional Democrats to force a precipitous withdrawal of American troops, resulted from four years of unrelievedly pessimistic reporting from Iraq—reporting that itself owed much to a media template forged decades earlier in Vietnam. If the success of the surge continues through 2008, and culminates in a stable Iraqi government, we can assume the gradual emergence of a new consensus, and perhaps, with time, even a change in the current low public regard for the administration and its war aims.

It would be folly to think, however, that one can sit by and wait for history to deliver a smiling verdict. Shifting judgments about the causes, conduct, and consequences of America conflicts are indeed the norm in American history. These ongoing swings depend in large part on whether the United States is thought to be winning or losing, and are finally codified only at war's end or well afterward. But for the cycle to play out, there must be a persistence of spirit and a willingness to see a war through *to* the end, as well as a bedrock confidence in both the capabilities of America's armed forces and the righteousness of the American cause.

After our aberrant defeat in Vietnam, we may have collectively forgotten that even successful wars of long duration undergo many incarnations, with accompanying swings of mood that alternately damn and support aims, methods, costs, and benefits. But this is in fact the pattern, and it has once again been discernible in Iraq. The road to defeat lies only in the willful denial of this elementary fact.

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RE-RETHINKING IRAQ

Anatomy of the Surge

Peter D. Feaver

OVER THE past sixteen months, the United States has altered its trajectory in Iraq. We are no longer headed toward a catastrophic defeat and may be on the path to a remarkable victory. As a result, the next President, Democrat or Republican, may well find it easier to adopt the broad contours of this administration's current strategy than to jeopardize progress by changing course abruptly.

That would be an ironic, but satisfying, outcome to the tortuous journey on which the Bush administration's policy toward Iraq, and this nation's views of Iraq, have been traveling over the past three years.

The administration's description of the long-term American goal—a democratic Iraq that can defend itself, govern itself, and sustain itself, and will be an ally in the war on terror—has remained consistent from the time the war was launched in 2003 until now. What has shifted, due to sobering experience, is its sense of how long it might take to achieve this goal: a time frame that has stretched from months, to years, and even to decades.

I witnessed the shift first-hand. For two years, from June 2005 to July 2007, I left my teaching position at Duke to join the National Security Council staff as a special adviser for strategic planning, and in that capacity I worked closely on Iraq policy. By the middle of 2005, it was painfully obvious to everyone involved that the only *decisive* outcome that could be achieved during President Bush's tenure was the triumph of our enemies, America's withdrawal, and Iraq's descent into a hellish chaos as yet undreamed of.

The challenge, therefore, was to develop and implement a workable strategy that could be handed over to Bush's successor. Although important progress could be made on that strategy during Bush's watch, ultimately it would be carried through by the next President. This was the reality behind the course followed by the administration in 2005-2006, and it remains the reality behind the new and different course the administration has been following since 2007.

This new and different strategy, now called the "surge" but at one point called by insiders the "bridge," emerged out of a growing recognition over 2006 that our critics were right about one thing: our Iraq policy was not working. At the same time, however, and whether knowingly or ignorantly, many of those same critics were insisting that the answer lay in pursuing precisely the same strategy we already had in place. That is, they were telling us that we needed (a) to push Iraqi government officials to come together politically and (b) to train Iraqi troops so that they could take over from American forces. We had been doing exactly these things for a year, and we had been driven to the brink.

PETER D. FEAVER, *a new contributor, is the Alexander F. Hehmeyer professor of political science and public policy at Duke University and director of the Triangle Institute for Security Studies. He is a co-author of* Getting the Best Out of College, *to be published by Ten Speed Press in June.*

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This was no solution at all. The results on the ground in Iraq made it clear that, without a dramatic change, the President would be leaving his successor with an untenable mess, if not the prospect of a catastrophic American rout. A review of administration policy was therefore launched that led to the dramatic course revision we have seen unfolding over the past year-and-a-half.

This month, the military leader of the surge, General David Petraeus, and America's chief diplomat in Iraq, Ambassador Ryan Crocker, will present their second report to Congress on the surge and its effects. Prudent and circumspect men, they will surely not advance bold claims on behalf of the policy the United States has been following under their leadership. But I expect they will speak more optimistically about the future than many thought possible eighteen months ago. Their testimony will demonstrate that, at last, the United States has a sustainable strategy for Iraq with a reasonable chance of success, and one that George W. Bush will be able to turn over with confidence to the next incumbent of the White House.

How we got here is a story in itself.

IN THE summer of 2005, General George Casey, the theater commander in Iraq, was pressing a military campaign whose primary goal was the training and maturing of Iraqi security forces. At the same time, Iraqis had designed a national constitution that would be the subject of a countrywide referendum in October, to be followed (assuming the constitution's ratification) by national elections in December.

Here at home, administration policy was inundated by criticisms on every front. Much of it was reckless, but not all of it. From "skeptical supporters" of the war like Senator John McCain and the military analyst Fred Kagan came the charge that the number of American "boots on the ground" was far from sufficient to accomplish the mission. Although our military commanders in Iraq kept assuring the White House that this was not the case, the criticism flitted like Banquo's ghost in the background of every internal discussion about the war.

Some Democrats in the "loyal opposition"—i.e., those who were not simply advocating an irresponsible strategy of defeat and withdrawal—made the same point, but more often they took a different tack. Charging that the administration had no strategy beyond "staying the course," they proposed instead that the United States pressure the Iraqis to bring the sullen and disaffected Sunni minority into the political sphere. This would siphon support from the insurgency. In addition, the Pentagon needed to accelerate the training of Iraqi security forces to handle more of the load against the enemies of the new Iraq. And the State Department had to lean on Iraq's neighbors to do more to help.

This counsel seemed maddeningly sensible to us. It was, to the letter, the administration's strategy at that very moment. Still, exasperating though it may have been to be told that we should do what we were actually doing, this line of criticism also seemed to contain potentially good news. Perhaps, we thought, we could find common ground with these Democratic critics—their number included Senators Hillary Clinton, Joseph Biden, and Carl Levin—and forge a consensus on how to move forward.

That was the background to a decision in the fall of 2005 to release an unclassified version of General Casey's campaign plan, along with a document explaining how all elements of American power were being mobilized to assist in its realization. The full document was called the National Strategy for Supporting Iraq, the name of which changed somewhere along the way to the National Strategy for Victory in Iraq (NSVI). There was nothing new here. The release of the NSVI, bolstered by a series of frank presidential addresses, was simply an attempt to make public a number of details about our approach and offer a reasonable response to our reasonable critics.

The effort was doomed. It was overtaken by political events or, rather, by one specific event: a press conference, on November 17, 2005, by John Murtha, a Democratic congressman from Pennsylvania.

Murtha was a veteran of the Vietnam war and a hawk on defense spending—someone generally thought to be at home with the old "Scoop" Jackson wing of the Democratic party. When it came to Iraq, he turned out to be something else. "Our military has accomplished its mission and done its duty," Murtha summarily declared at his press conference, and now it was time to bring the troops home—as soon as possible, but no later than in six months.

Murtha was not calling for a gradual transition to Iraqi control. To the contrary, he was advocating the wholesale abandonment of Iraq. As he well knew, moreover, six months would be the fastest possible withdrawal under the most optimistic timetable, with our forces working 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to pull out all of the equipment and materiel we had brought in over the previous three years. This was not a brief for haste but rather a recipe for panic.

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Unlike those critics who lambasted our policy and then commended it to our attention, Murtha was presenting an unambiguous alternative. The left wing of the Democratic party and its supporters in Moveon.org had finally found a spokesman with credentials on national security to make the most extreme case for the war's end.

The media lauded the Murtha plan, but they did not examine it closely. I spent hours with reporters in a futile effort to persuade them to show Murtha the respect of subjecting his scheme—including his bizarre notion of redeploying troops 5,000 miles away on the island of Okinawa in the Sea of Japan—to the same level of scrutiny they lavished upon administration policy. One key reporter told me, "We don't scrutinize Murtha's plan because none of us takes it seriously."

Inside the White House, we joked bitterly that the only way we could get people to see the flaws in Murtha's proposal would be to offer it as our own.

IN THE end, however, even if we had managed to secure some kind of bipartisan support for our strategy, it would have made little difference. Over the course of 2006, the National Strategy for Victory in Iraq collapsed.

We had assumed that steady political movement would drain Sunni support for the insurgency by giving Sunnis a stake in the new Iraq—and that such political progress could be completed before the safety of the Iraqi population had been secured. Alas, the stunningly successful constitutional referendum of October 2005 and the national election two months later were followed by a dreadful stalemate. It took Sunnis nearly six weeks to acknowledge that the vote had been free and fair, and then squabbling within the Shiite community paralyzed its politicians in turn. Month after month, the nascent Iraqi political class found itself unable to form and seat a government. Almost a half-year of political momentum was forgone.

No less worrisome was the discovery that the Iraqi security forces were not yet in any condition to shoulder an increasing portion of the burden—to "stand up" so that coalition forces could "stand down." At the same time, the security challenge became far grimmer. In February, al-Qaeda terrorists blew up the Golden Dome mosque in Samarra, one of the holiest Shiite shrines in Iraq. Shiite militia groups responded just as the terrorists had hoped, launching retaliatory strikes against Sunni citizens. A bloody pattern—sectarian atrocity, sectarian reprisal, sectarian counter-reprisal—took hold. Each week, attack levels reached new heights. Since even the vastly more capable U.S. forces seemed unable to tamp down the violence, there was no chance that fledgling Iraqi security forces might do so any time soon.

With the situation deteriorating throughout the spring, the administration might have begun the full-fledged reconsideration of the National Strategy for Victory that it would conduct later in the year. But suddenly the existing strategy appeared to receive a boost. After months of wrangling, the Iraqis finally installed a unity government under the leadership of the little-known Nouri al-Maliki. And U.S. special forces killed Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the charismatic leader of al Qaeda in Iraq and the mastermind behind its strategy of fomenting civil war between Sunnis and Shiites. Hope rekindled that the chaos could be brought under control.

But the boost proved illusory. General Casey launched a new effort to regain control of the capital, but within weeks it foundered when several of the Iraqi units on which it depended simply failed to show up for the fight. A revised version of the Casey plan likewise came a cropper when the new Maliki government interfered with efforts to go after rogue Shiite militias that were now rivaling al Qaeda in Iraq in wreaking havoc.

Over the summer, doubts began to grow among White House officials working on Iraq; by September the NSC staff initiated a quiet but thorough review of strategy with an eye to developing a new way forward. The review, which soon expanded beyond the confines of the National Security Council, became a matter of public knowledge after Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's departure in November, the day after the landslide Democratic victory in the midterm elections. The election underscored the fact that, at a minimum, the administration would have to reposition the Iraq mission in the minds of the American people. Our review confirmed that it would take more than a change of face to rescue the possibility of victory—it would take an entirely new strategy.

The idea was for our proposed change in course to be completed in time to take advantage of the release of another document. This was the much-awaited report of the Iraq Study Group, a bipartisan commission co-chaired by former Secretary of State James Baker and former Congressman Lee Hamilton. Inside the White House, we hoped that the report's recommendations would be palatable enough to blend with whatever new approach the President decided to adopt. The long-sought holy grail—a bipartisan consensus on the way forward in Iraq—seemed again within reach.

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It was not to be. While sharply criticizing the lack of progress thus far, the Baker-Hamilton commission essentially recommended back to us an accelerated version of the strategy envisioned by the NSVI: stand them up so we can stand down. While there was still some support inside the administration for continuing on that path, the interagency team on which I served was of a different mind. The situation in Iraq had eroded beyond the point envisioned by the Baker-Hamilton report; under the horrific conditions now at play, we concluded, Iraq's security forces were far more likely to crack under the strain than to "stand up." And those forces were the essential glue of a stable, unified future. If they went the way of Humpty Dumpty, neither they nor the new Iraq could ever be put back together again.

The Baker-Hamilton report did offer theoretical support for a short-term surge of military forces—something the President and the interagency team were also looking at very closely—but this was mentioned only in a brief passage and was far from the document's central thrust. The White House never succeeded in shifting the conventional wisdom in Washington that Baker-Hamilton provided an alternative to current policy. Nor, unfortunately, were we ready with our own genuine alternative when the Baker-Hamilton report was released on December 6, 2006. That put paid to the idea that we could use the occasion as a means of securing bipartisan support for a new approach. By the time the President announced the surge in January, the climate had turned frostier still.

By then, the leadership of the newly triumphant Democrats on Capitol Hill had already determined that the war was irretrievably lost and that the only responsible course was to get out as quickly as possible. Signaling the emphasis the Democrats meant to place on ending our involvement in Iraq quickly, Nancy Pelosi, the new speaker of the House, sought to make Jack Murtha her principal deputy.

As for the President's new strategy, the Democrats labeled it "an escalation"—no doubt because polls and focus groups showed that this would make it seem least palatable to the American public. The administration countered with the proposition that we were sending "reinforcements." The media settled on "surge." Each of these labels had the unfortunate side-effect of obscuring the many other changes contained in the new strategy and focusing attention exclusively on the increase in military troops—certainly the gutsiest element in terms of our domestic politics but by no means the only important one.

Week after week, the Democrats attempted to use their control of Congress to suffocate the surge in its cradle. Various proposals were advanced to hobble General Petraeus and render implementation impossible. In April, just as the 30,000 new surge troops were entering the country, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid declared peremptorily: "This war is lost, and this surge is not accomplishing anything."

Reid was wrong. While the political standoff in Washington worsened, the situation in Iraq began to improve. Not right away or all at once, of course. In fact, to judge by the measures of greatest salience to the American media, the situation only eroded in the first half of 2007. Attacks rose in number, as did American fatalities. But Petraeus was steadily refining and adapting the new strategy, and his efforts became especially productive after the full complement of new forces was on the ground and the "surge in operations" could begin in earnest by the beginning of June.

By September 2007, when Petraeus and Crocker gave their first report to Congress, the trend line toward success was discernible. Still, the matter remained debatable—to the point where Senator Clinton felt confident enough to inform Petraeus and Crocker on national television that "the reports you provided to us require the willing suspension of disbelief" and to characterize the two men as "the de-facto spokesmen of what many of us consider to be a failed policy."

A few months after that showdown, however, the progress was all but indisputable. By now, indeed, we can see that the surge has bought precious time for the United States and the nascent Iraqi state to progress meaningfully toward five specific objectives.

First is extirpating the inciters of sectarian violence: al Qaeda in Iraq among the Sunnis and the rogue militias among the Shiites. Second is building up a larger, more capable, and more integrated Iraqi Security Force than existed in 2006.

At the same time, Iraqis are being given the opportunity to create the means of political accommodation locally and from the "bottom up," in ways that reflect the realities of life inside the highly complex mosaic of their country. The achievement of this third goal is the precursor to the fourth, which is to make the central, "top down" government in Baghdad more responsive to the nation's eighteen provinces by opening its pocketbook for projects that will improve the economic and living conditions of the country's citizenry at large.

The final goal is, perhaps, the trickiest: pushing

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Iraqi politicians to pass legislation on a number of important measures, including the sharing of oil revenues, the funding of infrastructure projects, the reform of de-Baathification laws, and the like. These are the notorious "benchmarks" mentioned by the President in his January 2007 speech and subjected to much derision by skeptics.

A year after Bush first announced the new strategy, progress on the first three objectives has exceeded everyone's expectations, even those who helped design the surge. Al Qaeda in Iraq has been gravely wounded. The rogue elements within the Shiite militias are being pruned away. The Iraq Security Force is growing in size and reliability. And, following the decision of Sunni tribes to turn on al Qaeda and throw in their lot with the United States and the new Iraq, local political accommodation is proceeding at a remarkable pace.

There has also been some movement toward linking the Iraqi parliament's spending to the needs of localities, but so far this is less impressive. As for the benchmarks on political reconciliation from the top down, it is useful to recall that we once thought such political change should precede everything else. That approach did not work. Our new strategy was based on the contrary assumption that security came first, and that parliamentary progress would lag significantly behind other elements. Of course, this has hardly prevented the President's critics from seizing on the failure of the Iraqi government to have completed all of it benchmarks as putative evidence of the surge's overall failure. Even here, however, there has been a measure of progress on the ground: in February, for example, the Iraqi parliament passed legislation addressing several key benchmarks, notably including de-Baathification reform and the facilitation of provincial elections as well as of better relations between the provinces and the central government.

THE PETRAEUS-CROCKER report to Congress will no doubt offer further evidence that the new approach is working but is far from having completed its assigned task. No fair-minded observer could conclude otherwise. Petraeus has already indicated that the central military element of the surge—the increase of 30,000 troops—will end by summer 2008. At that point, U.S. forces in Iraq are set to decline to pre-surge levels, roughly 130,000. The question Petraeus will now have to answer is: how long will troop levels need to stay there, and when can they start moving down?

What Petraeus must have uppermost in his mind is the record compiled by his predecessors in trying to produce results with just enough troops to come close but not enough to succeed. A premature drawdown would, by definition, cause the forfeiture of his hard-won gains. And the political reality is that once those troops left Iraq, they would not be coming back.

In a slide presentation that accompanied his September 2007 testimony to Congress, Petraeus gave a picture of what he considered an appropriate drawdown. In his reckoning, after remaining at 130,000 for some time, American troops could decline in number to approximately 115,000, then by slow and measured steps to around 100,000, then perhaps to 85,000, and so onward. The closer the troop levels came to 100,000 (or fewer) the more manageable the deployment would be militarily. At those levels, our ground forces would be able to return to a peacetime rotation schedule, which would put far less strain on the all-volunteer force.

In other words, a substantial American presence in Iraq is sustainable militarily over the long term. The great unknown is whether such a commitment would be sustainable politically here at home.

The evidence of the past sixteen months is that the American people are likely to support, or at least tolerate, a reduction in American numbers gradual enough to preserve the gains of the surge. A President McCain, for example, would probably have no trouble taking advantage of this sustainable strategy and bringing our mission in Iraq to the most successful end achievable.

What of a President Barack Obama or a President Hillary Clinton? If one were to attempt an answer to this question from the two candidates' words and conduct during the long primary season, one would have reason to conclude that both, in promising a rapid "end" to the war with an equally rapid withdrawal of American forces, are bound and determined to snatch defeat from the jaws of at least partial victory.

But it is not impossible to imagine that these vital matters would appear differently to a Democratic President considering Iraq's and America's future from a seat at the desk in the Oval Office rather than from the stage of a college gymnasium filled with delirious Democratic primary voters. One might even permit oneself to hope that, while continuing to speak derogatorily of George Bush's years as the shepherd of our Iraq policy, such a President would come to know, privately and in time, that he or she had been bequeathed something very different from a fiasco: the promise of a better outcome for Iraq, for the Middle East, and for the American people.

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Re-rethinking Iraq

Obama's War

Peter Wehner

Throughout his dramatic campaign to win his party's nomination for the presidency, Senator Barack Obama has tended to ignore the specifics of policy in favor of the generalities of emotion, centering his appeal to voters on vague promises of "change" and "unity." But on one issue, above all others, Obama has remained fixated from the campaign's first moment, and that is the war in Iraq. By Obama's own account, the consistency of his stand on this war demonstrates more than anything else that he, a one-term United States Senator who arrived in Washington in 2005 with no foreign-policy experience, after an uneventful eight-year stint in the Illinois state senate, possesses the wisdom, the clear-sightedness, and the judgment to assume the responsibilities of the nation's commander-in-chief.

Obama calls Iraq "the most important foreign-policy decision in a generation." By the word "decision," presumably, he means to refer at once to President Bush's decision to invade Iraq, Congress's decision to authorize that policy, and his own early decision to oppose any such action.

Indeed, Obama was not yet in the Senate, and the Senate had not yet voted to authorize the war, when, in a speech delivered in Chicago on October 2, 2002, he announced his view of the matter. Granting forthrightly that the Iraqi despot Saddam Hussein had "repeatedly defied UN resolutions, thwarted UN inspection teams, developed chemical and biological weapons, and coveted nuclear capacity," and that he "butchers his own people," Obama nevertheless held that, despite all these well-proven crimes, Saddam posed no "imminent and direct threat to the United States or to his neighbors." What is more, he added, "I know that even a successful war against Iraq will require a U.S. occupation of undetermined length, at undetermined cost, with undetermined consequences."

Nine days later, the Senate passed its resolution granting George Bush the authority to use force to remove Saddam Hussein from power. In the Senate that day were four of Obama's rivals in this year's Democratic contest for the presidency—Hillary Clinton, John Edwards, Christopher Dodd, and Joseph Biden—and all four voted in favor.* A fifth rival, Governor Bill Richardson of New Mexico, also spoke out in support of the war.

Alone among this year's major Democratic candidates, then, Obama can claim an unspotted record of opposition to American involvement in Iraq and even a kind of prescience as to the subsequent course of events there. In any account of his electoral success so far, this factor must weigh as heavily as his natural eloquence and his ingratiating personality.

Peter Wehner *is a senior fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C. He served in the Bush White House as director of the office of strategic initiatives.*

* So, for that matter, did John Kerry, the party's nominee for President in 2004.

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But Obama's thoughts on the war in Iraq did not begin and end with that one speech in October 2002. In fact, an examination of both his statements and his Senate votes over the intervening years demonstrates something very different from the consistency that he and his supporters have claimed for him. It demonstrates instead a record of problematically ad-hoc judgments at best, calculatingly cynical judgments at worst. Even if, for the sake of argument, one were to stipulate that Barack Obama was right in 2002, what does this subsequent record say about his fitness to serve?

ALMOST AS soon as the war began in March 2003, Obama had second thoughts about his opposition to it. Watching the dramatic footage of the toppling of Saddam's statue in Baghdad, and then the President's speech aboard the U.S.S. *Abraham Lincoln*, "I began to suspect," he would write later in his autobiographical *The Audacity of Hope* (2006), "that I might have been wrong." And these second thoughts seem to have stayed with him throughout the entire first phase of the occupation following our initial combat victory. As he told the *Chicago Tribune* in July 2004, "There's not that much difference between my position and George Bush's position at this stage."

This is hardly to say that he had suddenly metamorphosed into a hawk, let alone a supporter of the President's broader freedom agenda. Indeed, one would search long and hard for any words from this apostle of hope and change about the palpable benefits that democracy might bring to the Arabs and Muslims of the Middle East. Rather, he seems to have sensed a political weakness in his blanket opposition to a venture still enjoying broad support in the country, and one in which tens of thousands of American soldiers were risking their lives.

And so, in September 2004, in the heat of his campaign for the U.S. Senate, Obama said (according to an AP report) that even though Bush had "bungled his handling of the war," simply pulling out of Iraq "would make things worse." Therefore, he himself

> would be willing to send more soldiers to Iraq if it is part of a strategy that the President and military leaders believe will stabilize the country and eventually allow America to withdraw.
>
> "If that strategy made sense and would lead ultimately to the pullout of U.S. troops but in the short term required additional troop strength to protect those who are already on the ground, then that's something I would support," said Obama.

In November, having won election to the U.S. Senate, Obama once again confirmed his determination to stay the course in Iraq in an interview with PBS's Charlie Rose. "Once we go in, then we're committed," he said, adding:

> [O]nce the decision was made, then we've got to do everything we can to stabilize the country, to make it successful, because we'll have too much at stake in the Middle East. And that's the position that I continue to take.

Indeed it was—for about a year. During that time, Obama delivered only one major speech on Iraq, in November 2005. At that point the situation on the ground was still very rocky and showing few if any signs of material improvement, and there was much talk of "exit strategies" in the air. But most liberal critics of the war (outside the rabid Left) were still not quite ready to cut and run. Accordingly, while reiterating that he had strongly opposed the Iraq war before it began, Obama also restated his belief that, having gone in, we had an obligation to "manage our exit in a responsible way—with the hope of leaving a stable foundation for the future, but at the very least taking care not to plunge the country into an even deeper and, perhaps, irreparable crisis."

How were we to accomplish that? The answer was: slowly but surely. In the months to come, Obama said, "we need to focus our attention on how to reduce the U.S. military footprint in Iraq. Notice that I say 'reduce,' and not 'fully withdraw.'" With a hint of greater specificity, he elaborated in January 2006 that "we have a role to play in stabilizing the country as Iraqis are getting their act together."

Presumably what Obama was referring to here was the strategy of training indigenous Iraqi forces to "stand up" so that we could "stand down." This was the same view of the military situation held by other critics of the Bush administration—and by the administration itself, which was in the process of trying to implement just that strategy.* But as conditions in Iraq worsened over the course of 2006 and polls registered lower and lower levels of support for the President and the war—and as he himself was nearing a decision to run for the presidency—Obama's position shifted again, markedly so.

On October 22, 2006, Obama proclaimed the urgent necessity for "all the leadership in Washington to execute a serious change of course in Iraq." That change was decidedly not in the direction of step-

* For documentation of this point, see the essay by Peter D. Feaver "Anatomy of the Surge" beginning on page 24 of this issue—Ed.

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ping up our war effort by sending additional troops—a shift advocated by some conservative critics of administration policy and at that point being seriously considered by the White House and the Pentagon. Quite the contrary: the change Obama had in mind was to initiate, as quickly as possible, a "phased withdrawal" from Iraq. There was to be no more talk from him about leaving a "stabilized" situation. Nor, for Obama, was the issue debatable. His latest predictive judgment was that "We cannot, through putting in more troops or maintaining the presence that we have, expect that somehow the situation is going to improve."

On January 10, 2007, Bush announced the administration's change in strategy in Iraq, popularly dubbed the "surge." That very night, Obama declared he saw nothing in the plan that would "make a significant dent in the sectarian violence that's taking place there." A week later, he repeated the point emphatically: the surge strategy would "not prove to be one that changes the dynamics significantly." Later in the same month, he summed up in these words his impression of the hearings on the new strategy held by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee: "What was striking to me, in listening to all the testimony that was provided, was the almost near-unanimity that the President's strategy will not work."

Whatever he was listening to, it could not have been "all the testimony." But the main point is that, within a mere matter of weeks, Obama had moved to align himself with the most extreme critics of the war. This re-positioning coincided with the announcement of his presidential candidacy on February 10, 2007. "It's time to start bringing our troops home," Obama said forcefully as he launched his run. "That's why I have a plan that will bring our combat troops home by March of 2008."

In May 2007, Obama did something he had never done previously: he voted in the Senate against funding for combat operations, claiming as a reason the fact that the bill included no timeline for troop withdrawal. As the campaign season intensified, his position hardened still more. In September, a mere three months after the final elements of the 30,000-strong surge forces had landed in Iraq, he declared that the moment had arrived to remove all of our combat troops "immediately." "Not in six months or one year—now."

By then, though, a fairly substantial drop in violence was already discernible in Iraq. Without exactly denying this fact, Obama insisted that it had nothing to do with the surge, a point he repeated incessantly during the early months of 2008. In a presidential debate in January, for example, he claimed the reduction in violence was due not to increased American military action but to the attention paid by Iraqi insurgents and al-Qaeda terrorists to the results of America's midterm elections in November 2006, when control of Congress passed to the Democrats:

> Much of that violence has been reduced because there was an agreement with tribes in Anbar province, Sunni tribes, who started to see, after the Democrats were elected in 2006, you know what?—the Americans may be leaving soon. And we are going to be left very vulnerable to the Shiites. We should start negotiating now.

This was an astonishing statement on several counts. For one thing, the "Anbar Awakening"—in which Sunni tribes formerly allied with al Qaeda in Iraq turned on the foreign terrorists who had been making their lives a repressive hell—preceded the midterm election by several months. It had no connection with American electoral cycles and every connection with the brutality of al Qaeda (as internal al-Qaeda communications frankly conceded). For another thing, the prospect of a precipitous American retreat, far from helping along the chances of a negotiated political settlement between warring Iraqi factions, would almost certainly have created the opposite effect, reinvigorating the murderous hopes of the terrorist forces lately on the run and thereby undoing the Awakening altogether. Nor, incidentally, have those forces ever troubled themselves to discriminate between Sunni and Shiite in their frenzied determination to seize control. Finally, the sheikhs of Anbar have themselves testified to the crucially fortifying effect of the U.S. offensive against al Qaeda in Iraq, and there is no reason to doubt their word.

Obama's corkscrew logic would take an even more bizarre twist in February of this year when Tim Russert of NBC News asked him if, as President, he would reserve the right to go back into Iraq with sizable forces if the American withdrawal he advocated should end by introducing even greater mayhem. Previously Obama had asserted categorically that, on his watch, no permanent American bases would be left in Iraq and that the few American troops remaining there would have only a very limited mission: to protect our embassy and our diplomatic corps and to engage in counterterrorism. But in his answer to Russert he now broadened his options:

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> As commander-in-chief, I will always reserve the right to make sure that we are looking out for American interests. And if al Qaeda is forming a base in Iraq, then we will have to act in a way that secures the American homeland and our interests abroad.

To wonted illogic this added both ignorance and disingenuousness. By his statement Obama may have intended to project a certain tough-mindedness in dealing with new threats, but as Senator John McCain pointed out in a devastating riposte, al Qaeda is *already* in Iraq. That is why its forces there are called "al Qaeda in Iraq" (or, to use the terrorist organization's own nomenclature, "al Qaeda in Meso-potamia"). What is more, if Obama had had his way in 2007, our troops would have been out of Iraq by March of this year, leaving it naked to its enemies. If we were to withdraw them in the early months of an Obama presidency, al Qaeda in Iraq could be counted on not only to form "a base" but to take over large swaths of the country. Having overseen such a withdrawal, and having thereby unraveled all the gains of the surge, Obama would face the prospect of ordering them to return under far more treacherous conditions of his own making.

To say that Senator Obama has not thought through the implications of his vertiginously shifting positions is to err on the side of charity; in fact they give every appearance of having been adopted without any systematic thought whatsoever. The same, unfortunately, can be said for the other main pillar of his position on Iraq. This is that the way to bring stability to that country is not by winning the war in the first place but rather by striking a "new compact in the region"—one that will include all of Iraq's neighbors, including Syria and Iran. Such a compact, he says, will "secure Iraq's borders, keep neighbors from meddling, isolate al Qaeda, and support Iraq's unity."

Never mind that Syria and Iran have spent the past years doing everything in their power to violate Iraq's borders, meddle in its affairs, arm and support the factions that have been killing Iraqis and American troops alike, and fracture its unity. To Obama, all this murderous activity is but the understandable reaction of frustrated governments to the policies of George Bush (and, although he does not say so, every single one of his predecessors going back decades). By contrast, if he himself were elected President, both Iran and Syria would utterly reverse direction.

Obama's unlimited faith in diplomacy as a means of resolving deep-seated differences among nation-states is not exclusive to the Middle East. When asked if, during the first year of his presidency, he would meet individually and without precondition with the leaders of Iran, Syria, Venezuela, Cuba, and North Korea, he replied: "I would. And the reason is this, that the notion that somehow not talking to countries is punishment to them . . . is ridiculous." So enamored is he of this pledge that he has re-stated it regularly in the course of the campaign. Whenever he is asked how he would address a thorny foreign-policy issue, he invokes the need for diplomacy—first, last, and always.

The columnist Charles Krauthammer once characterized this disposition as the "broken-telephone theory of international conflict"—i.e., the belief that if nations fail to get along, the fault is to be found in some misunderstanding, some misperception, some problem of communication that can be cleared up by "talking." In Obama's case, the syndrome is compounded by unfeigned confidence in the power of his own personal charm to bridge whatever differences may separate us from those who hate us.

Thus, when it comes specifically to Iraq and its implacably hostile neighbors, he refuses even to entertain the possibility that diplomacy might fail, or to consider what steps would be necessary should that in fact happen. Nor has he deigned to credit or even to notice the strenuous diplomatic efforts undertaken over the last eight years by the allegedly trigger-happy Bush administration to negotiate with Iran, North Korea, and others. Nor, finally, has he absorbed any useful lesson from the disillusioning outcomes of these efforts—let alone other, even more emollient efforts by our European allies and the United Nations. Such willful innocence, in a President, can be lethal.

It is perfectly legitimate to argue, as Senator Obama does, that the war to liberate Iraq was ill-conceived and has cost us much more than it has been worth. It is also perfectly legitimate to argue, as Senator McCain does, that the war was eminently worth waging but that the Bush administration massively mishandled the phase following the ousting of the Baathist regime.

It is another matter entirely to argue that because the decision to go to war was wrong, we should now simply withdraw and wash our hands of Iraq in hopes of starting over. There is no starting over in world affairs. We are where we are, and the next President will have to play, one can only hope wisely, the hand he will have been dealt. But

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by the same token, there is also no way of establishing that, had the decision in 2002 gone the other way—that is, Obama's way—today's security situation would be better for us than it has actually turned out to be, mistakes and all. Especially now, when our prospects in Iraq have greatly improved, indulging in such exercises of revisionist history is wholly fatuous.

In this connection, though, it is also no wonder that Obama describes the war in Iraq as "the most important foreign-policy *decision* in a generation." His formulation neatly focuses on the moment *before* American and allied troops went into battle in March 2003—a moment when Obama can claim to have seen, with perfect clarity, the entire subsequent unfolding of history. But quite aside from the fact that that moment came and went five years ago, the real question has to do with his vision in the meantime concerning the most important foreign-policy *issue* in our generation.

Unlike his presidential rival John McCain, an early and vocal and truly consistent critic of the Bush administration's counterinsurgency strategy in Iraq, Obama, as we have seen, was opposed to doing anything about Iraq even when, like everyone else, he believed Saddam Hussein was a menace who was likely armed with weapons of mass destruction; became a supporter of the war after the fact and remained one even as things were going poorly; and morphed into an aggressive opponent again just as the prospects of an American victory began to brighten. If there is a consistency here, it would appear to be the consistency of one consistently divorced from the facts on the ground and, lately, almost hermetically sealed off from even the possibility of good news. In a politician admired for his supposed open-mindedness and his ready willingness to consider new evidence, this is, to say the least, striking.*

But perhaps a different kind of consistency is to be discerned in this maze. When Obama opposed the war in 2002, it was clearly in his political interest to do so; according to Dan Shomon, his campaign manager at the time, the key to Obama's chances in the Democratic race for the Senate nomination lay in his ability to rally the Left to his side.† Then, in 2004, when the war was still supported by most Americans, he associated himself with the Bush occupation strategy. In 2005, as Iraq was becoming increasingly unpopular, he temporized by joining those saying we had to reduce but not withdraw our troop presence. By 2006, with the war's unpopularity deepening, he embraced a policy of full-scale withdrawal.

Having hitched his fortunes to this last position—i.e., that the war is lost and it is time for us to leave—he is in something of a predicament, having either to deny the clear evidence of progress in Iraq or to rewrite and revise his personal history. On the latter front, indeed, he has recently gone so far as to claim that when the surge was announced, he had "no doubt" that "if we place 30,000 more troops in there, then we would see an improvement in the security situation and we would see a reduction in the violence." In fact, as we have seen, he volubly argued just the opposite.

Like the rest of the story rehearsed here, what all this suggests is that Barack Obama does not represent an authentic new "brand" in American politics; rather, he has shown himself to be an exceptionally adept political animal who can adjust to the prevailing political winds with seamless ease. As the election season progresses, it remains to be seen what tortuously defended new positions will be embraced by this consistently political politician, and what price they will exact in his reputation as a principled and courageous new voice.

* Obama's position on Darfur offers another striking instance of inconsistency. The very concerns that drive his commitment there—ending genocide and not allowing a failed state to become a breeding ground for terrorism—apply in Iraq. Why, then, does he champion in Iraq a policy that would bring about exactly what he is trying to prevent in Sudan?

† In "Cinderella Story" (the *New Republic*, February 27, 2008), Michael Crowley adduces this and other facts pertaining to Obama's record on Iraq.

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The God of the Gaps

David Berlinski

THE IDEA that human beings have been endowed with powers and properties not found elsewhere in the animal kingdom—or, so far we can tell, in the universe—arises from a simple impulse: just look around. It is an impulse that handily survives the fraternal invitation to consider the great apes. The apes are, after all, behind the bars of their cages, and we are not. Eager for the experiments to begin, they are also impatient for their food to be served, and they seem impatient for little else. After undergoing years of punishing trials at the hands of determined clinicians, a few have been taught the rudiments of various primitive symbol systems. Having been given the gift of language, they have nothing to say. When two simian prodigies meet, they fling their placards at each other.

More is expected, but more is rarely forthcoming. Experiments—and they are exquisite—conducted by Dorothy Cheney and Robert Seyfarth indicate that like other mammals, baboons have a rich inner world. Simian social structures are often intricate. Chimpanzees, bonobos, and gorillas reason; they form plans; they have preferences; they are cunning; they have passions and desires; and they suffer. In much of this, we see ourselves. But beyond what we have in common with the apes, we have nothing in common, and while the similarities are interesting, the differences are profound.

If human beings are as human beings think they are, then questions arise about *what* they are, and so do responses. These responses are ancient. They have arisen spontaneously in every culture. They have seemed to men and women the obvious conclusions to be drawn from just looking around. Accordingly, an enormous amount of intellectual effort has been invested in persuading men and women *not* to look around.

"With all deference to the sensibilities of religious people, the idea that man was created in the image of God can surely be put aside." Thus *Nature* magazine in a recent editorial. As for those unwilling to put their "sensibilities" aside, the scientific community has concluded that they are afflicted by a form of intellectual ingratitude. After all, the same editorial insists, "The idea that human minds are the product of evolution is unassailable fact."

It is remarkable how widespread our ingratitude really is, and also how far back it goes.

DAVID BERLINSKI *is the author of, among other books,* A Tour of the Calculus, Newton's Gift, *and* Infinite Ascent: A Short History of Mathematics. *His contributions to* COMMENTARY, *which can be found at* www.commentarymagazine.com, *include most recently "On the Origins of the Mind" (November 2004) and "On the Origins of Life" (February 2006). The present essay is adapted from his new book,* The Devil's Delusion: Atheism and Its Scientific Pretensions, *published by Crown Forum, a division of Random House, Inc.* *Copyright © 2008 by David Berlinski.*

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II

Together with Charles Darwin, Alfred Wallace created the modern theory of evolution. He has been unjustly neglected by history—perhaps because, shortly after conceiving his theory, he came to doubt its veracity. Darwin, too, had his doubts; no one reading *On the Origin of Species* can miss its note of moral anxiety. But Darwin's doubts arose because, in considering his theory's implications, he feared it might be true. With Wallace, it was the other way around. Considering its implications, he suspected the theory might be false.

In an essay entitled "Sir Charles Lyell on Geological Climates and the Origin of Species" (1869), Wallace outlined his sense that evolution was inadequate to explain certain obvious features of the human race. The essay is of great importance. It marks a falling-away in faith on the part of a sensitive biologist previously devoted to ideas he himself introduced.

Certain of our "physical characteristics," Wallace observes in this essay, "are not explicable on the theory of variation and survival of the fittest"—the criteria of Darwinian natural selection. These characteristics include the human brain, the organs of speech and articulation, the human hand, and the external human form with its upright posture and bipedal gait. Thus, only human beings can rotate their thumbs and ring fingers in what is called "ulnar opposition" in order to achieve a grip, a grasp, and a degree of torque denied to any of the great apes. So, too, with the other items on Wallace's list. What remains is evolutionary fantasy, of the sort in which the bipedal gait is assigned to an unrecoverable ancestor wishing to peer (or pee) over tall savannah grasses.

It is with respect to the human mind that Wallace's argument gathers real force. Do we understand why, alone among the animals, human beings have acquired language? Or a refined and delicate moral system? Or art, architecture, music, dance, or mathematics? This is a severely abbreviated list. The body of world literature and philosophy offers an extended commentary on human nature, yet over the course of more than 4,000 years it has not exhausted its mysteries.

And here is the curious thing. Wallace writes that, among human beings, there is no evident distinction between the mental powers of the most primitive and the most advanced. Raised in today's England instead of the Ecuadoran Amazon, a native child of the head-hunting Jívaro tribe, otherwise destined for a life loping through the jungle, would learn to speak perfect English and upon graduation from Oxford or Cambridge would enjoy the double advantage of a modern intellectual worldview and a valuable ethnic heritage. He might become a mathematician. Or, for all anyone knows, he might find himself a commentator on the BBC, lucidly defending the cultural value of head-hunting in the Ecuadoran jungle.

From this manner of observation it follows, Wallace argued, that characteristic human abilities must be latent in primitive man, existing somehow as an unopened gift—the entryway to a world that primitive man himself does not possess and would not recognize. But the idea that a biological species might possess latent powers makes no sense in Darwinian terms. It suggests the forbidden doctrine that evolutionary advantages were frontloaded, far away and long ago. It is in conflict with the Darwinian principle that just as useful genes are selected for cultivation and advancement, useless genes are subject to negative selection pressure and must therefore drain away into the sands of time.

Wallace identified a frank conflict between his own theory and what seemed to him to be obvious facts about the solidity and unchangeability of human nature. That conflict persists; it has not been resolved.

III

No one doubts that human beings now alive are connected to human beings who lived thousands of years ago. To look at Paleolithic cave drawings is to understand that the graphic arts have not changed radically in 12,000 years. And no one doubts that human beings are connected to the rest of the animal kingdom. It is rather more difficult, however, to take what no one doubts and fashion from it an effective defense of the thesis that human beings are nothing but the living record of a random and extended evolutionary process. That requires a disciplined commitment to a point of view that owes nothing to the sciences, however loosely construed, and astonishingly little to the evidence.

Why, then, has the kinship between human beings and the apes been so avidly promoted in contemporary culture, and not just as an "unassailable fact" but as a positive moral virtue?

The reason is that it functions as a hedge against religious belief, in particular the belief in man's uniqueness. "Chimps and gorillas have long been the battleground of our search of uniqueness," wrote the late Stephen Jay Gould,

for if we could establish an unambiguous dis-

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> tinction—of kind rather than degree—between ourselves and our closest relatives, we might gain the justification long sought for our cosmic arrogance.

Following Gould, whose "cool authentic voice" he finds irresistible, Christopher Hitchens has likewise declared against our cosmic arrogance and in favor of mere cosmic happenstance. "If the numberless evolutions from the Cambrian period could be recorded and 'rewound,'" Hitchens writes in *God Is Not Great*, "and the tape played again, he [Gould] established there was no certainty it would come out the same way."

Of course, having no access to the tape of life, Gould established nothing of the sort. Yet so committed is Hitchens to his tautology that he repeats it. Had an early vertebrate named Pakaia not survived, he reports in amazement, its survivors would also not have survived. One waits breathlessly for Hitchens to enlarge upon these exercises in just-so logic to encompass nonlinear dynamics and Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, totems that in his "scientific" defense of atheism he waves at the reader like a majestic frond.

When our cosmic arrogance is not being dismissed as religious prejudice, it is dismissed as a celebration of mere trivialities. Writing about "our inner ape," the zoologist Frans de Waal is concerned to demonstrate "how much [they] resemble us and how much we resemble them." How much, then? De Waal's answer: "If an extraterrestrial were to visit earth, he would have a hard time seeing most of the differences we treasure between ourselves and the apes."

Well, yes. If a fish were thoughtfully to consider the matter, it might have a hard time determining the differences we treasure between Al Gore and a sperm whale: both of them are large, and one of them is streamlined. But suppose the fish wanted a more detailed demonstration. Then it might profitably consult a fundamental paper on the subject published in *Science* in 1975. In it, M.C. King and A.C. Wilson provided for the first time an estimate of the degree of similarity between the human and the chimpanzee genome.

Far more than was thought possible, King and Wilson assert, human beings and chimpanzees do share the greater part of their respective genomes. But should we therefore conclude that if our genomes match up so nicely, we must *be* apes? In the second section of their paper, King and Wilson expound the deficiencies of that idea:

> Although humans and chimpanzees are rather similar in the structure of thorax and arms, they differ substantially not only in brain size but also in the anatomy of the pelvis, foot, and jaw, as well as in relative lengths of limbs and digits. Humans and chimpanzees also differ significantly in many other anatomical respects, to the extent that nearly every bone in the body of a chimpanzee is readily distinguishable in shape and size from its human counterpart. Associated with these anatomical differences there are, of course, major differences in posture, mode of locomotion, methods of procuring food, and means of communication. Because of these major differences in anatomy and way of life, biologists place the two species not just in separate genera but in separate families.

There is nothing in this that was not evident to Alfred Wallace—or to any student of comparative anatomy. King and Wilson go on to suggest that the morphological and behavioral differences between humans and the apes, if they are not due to variations between their respective genomes, must be due to variations in their genomic regulatory systems. These control the activities of the various genes by telling them when to sound off and when to shut up. They are of an astonishing complexity, if only because they themselves require regulation. Higher-order regulation in turn involves higher-order codes beyond the genetic code, and these codes then require their own regulation. Even the simplest cell involves an intricate, never-ending cascade of control and coordination of a sort never seen in the physical world.

It is entirely safe to assign the differences between human beings and the apes to their regulatory systems. But nothing is known about the evolutionary emergence of those systems, and we cannot describe them with any clarity. Whatever the source of the human distinction, however, its existence is obvious, and when it is carelessly denied, the result is a characteristic form of inanity.

Thus, an English professor named Jonathan Gottschall has recounted his experience reading Homer's *Iliad* while under the influence of Desmond Morris's *The Naked Ape*. "[T]his time around," Gottshall writes,

> I . . . experienced the *Iliad* as a drama of naked apes—strutting, preening, fighting, and bellowing their power in fierce competition for social dominance, beautiful women, and material resources.

Actually, social dominance and material resources are not quite to the point:

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> Intense competition between great apes, as described both by Homer and by primatologists, frequently boils down to precisely the same thing: access to females.

The governing words in this quotation are "boils down." What is essential about the boiling process is not what has been distilled but what has evaporated—namely, everything that is of interest in the *Iliad*.

For those purporting to be worried about the cosmic arrogance of human beings, what this suggests is an obvious counsel of humility. Before putting aside so flippantly "the idea that man was created in the image of God," they might first consider the ideas they propose to champion in its place.

IV

"In much the same way as prophets and seers and great theologians seem to have died out," Christopher Hitchens claims in *God Is Not Great*, "so the age of miracles seems to lie somewhere in our past."

Prophets and seers? I would have thought that Einstein, Bohr, Gödel, Schrödinger, Heisenberg, Dirac, and even Richard Feynman were all, in their own way, prophets and seers.

And miracles? The word seems to engender its own current of contempt. If one demands of a miracle that it violate the inviolable, there can be, by definition, no miracles. Surely this is too infantile a victory to afford even Christopher Hitchens a sense of satisfaction; he does not deign to debate the proposition that what could not be cannot be.

A miracle is exactly what it seems: an event offering access to the divine. And if this is what miracles are, whether they are seen will always be contingent on who is looking.

The miracles of religious tradition are historical. They reflect the power the ancient Hebrews brought to bear on their experiences. They did what they could, they saw what they could see. But we have other powers. We are the heirs to a magnificent scientific tradition. We can see farther than men whose horizons were bounded by the burning desert.

In a remark now famous, Feynman observed with respect to quantum electrodynamics that its control over the natural world is so accurate that in measuring the distance from New York to Los Angeles, theory and experiment would diverge by less than the width of a human hair. Einstein's theory of general relativity is in some respects equally accurate. We cannot account for these unearthly results. The laws of nature neither explain themselves nor predict their success. We have no reason to expect such gifts, and if we have come to expect them, that is only because, as the saints have always warned, we expect far more than we deserve.

Foremost among the undeserving are evolutionary dogmatists of the brand represented by Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennett and marketed by their apostle Hitchens. Although theirs is not an undertaking notable for imaginativeness, it does seem to have conjured up a kind of god. Unlike the God of old, who ruled over everything, this god rules over lapses in argument or evidence. He is a presiding god, but with limited administrative functions. With gaps in view, he undertakes the specialized activity of incarnating himself as a stopgap. He may be called the god of the gaps.

As a rhetorical contrivance, the god of the gaps makes his effect contingent on a specific assumption: whatever the gaps, they *will* in the course of scientific research be filled. It is an assumption both intellectually primitive and morally abhorrent—primitive because it reflects an absence of curiosity, and abhorrent because it assigns to our intellectual future a degree of authority alien to human experience.

The truth is otherwise: Western science has indeed proceeded by filling gaps, but in filling them it has created gaps all over again. The process is inexhaustible. Einstein created the special theory of relativity to accommodate certain anomalies in the interpretation of Clerk Maxwell's theory of the electromagnetic field. Special relativity led directly to general relativity. But general relativity is inconsistent with quantum mechanics. Understanding has improved, but within the physical sciences, anomalies have grown great, and what is more, anomalies have grown great because understanding has improved.

The god of the gaps? Why not say with equal authority that, for all we know, it is the God of old who continues to preside over the bent world with His accustomed fearsome majesty, and that He has chosen to draw the curtain on His own magnificence at precisely the place where general relativity and quantum mechanics should have met but do not touch? Whether gaps in our understanding reveal nothing more than the god of the gaps or nothing less than the God of old is hardly a matter open to rational debate.

This, however, has hardly prevented peevish displays of vanity on the part of scientists. In considering the possibility that the facts of biology might

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suggest an intelligent designer—which surely they do, even if they do not prove the case—the Darwinian biologist Emile Zuckerkandl has found it difficult to contain his indignation. Writing in the journal *Gene*, he overflows with epithets:

> The intellectual virus named "intelligent design". . . certainly is a problem in the country. . . . [T]he "creationists" . . . have decided some years ago . . . to dress up in academic gear and to present themselves as scholars. . . . [T]hey try to foster on society . . . some enterprising superghost. The "intelligent designers'" theme song . . . guided by a little angel . . . medieval in concept . . . an intellectually dangerous condition . . . the divine jumping disease. . . . Feeding like leeches on irrational beliefs . . . offensive little swarms of insects . . . must be taken care of by spraying biological knowledge. . . .

And so forth. For his part, Daniel Dennett answers the proponents of intelligent design thusly:

> Contemporary biology has demonstrated *beyond all reasonable doubt* that natural selection—the process in which reproducing entities must compete for finite resources and thereby engage in a tournament of blind trial and error from which improvements *automatically* emerge—has the power to generate breathtakingly ingenious designs. [emphasis added]

The self-confidence here is wonderful. Nothing in the physical sciences, it should go without saying, has been demonstrated beyond "all reasonable doubt." The phrase belongs to a court of law. As for the thesis that improvements in life appear "automatically," it represents nothing more than Daniel Dennett's conviction that living systems are like elevators: if their buttons are pushed, they go up. Or down, as the case may be. Although Darwin's theory is very often compared favorably with the great theories of mathematical physics, on the grounds that evolution is, in the hackneyed phrase, as well established as gravity, very few physicists have been heard observing that gravity is as well established as evolution. They know better, and they are not stupid.

Nor are all biologists. They know better, too. The greater part of the debate over Darwin's theory is not in service to the facts, or to the theory. The facts are what they have always been: unforthcoming. And the theory is what it always was: unpersuasive. "Darwin?" a Nobel laureate in biology once remarked to me over his bifocals. "That's just the party line."

THE GOD of the gaps occupies a very considerable comfort zone in biology. We know better than we ever did that a great many aspects of biological behavior are innate. They arise in each organism. They are a part of its nature. This is certainly true of human beings. The point has been made with great force by the linguist Noam Chomsky. Just as children are not taught to walk, they are not taught to speak. The environment serves only to trigger an innate program for maturation. Human language is the very expression of human nature.

This is widely seen as offering dramatic confirmation of Darwinian evolution. It is easy to see why. What is "innate" in an organism, so it is claimed, reflects its genetic endowment, and its genetic endowment reflects the long process in which random variations were sifted by a stern and unforgiving environment. If we are born with the ability to acquire a natural language, the gift lies within our genes and our genes lie within the shifting tides of time.

The view is common; it is also incoherent. What is both interesting and innate in an organism cannot be explained in terms of its genetic endowment. If the concept of a gene has any content at all, it lies entirely within the context of molecular biology and biochemistry. The gene is a chemical, a part of the molecule deoxyribonucleic acid, or DNA. Its function is straightforward: it specifies the proteins needed by a living organism, and it specifies them by means of a remarkably complicated system of translation and transcription. To speak clearly of the genetic endowment of an organism is to speak *only* of the passage from one chemical structure to another, and nothing more.

But to speak of the genetic endowment of an organism in terms that answer any interesting question *about* the organism is to go quite beyond the coordination of chemicals. It is to speak of what an organism does, how it reacts, what plans it makes, and how it executes them; it is to assign to a biological creature precisely the properties always assigned to such creatures: intention, desire, volition, need, passion, curiosity, despair, boredom, rage.

These properties of a living system cannot be easily seen as the consequences of any chemical reaction. It would be like suggesting that a tendency toward kleptomania follows the dissociation of water into hydrogen and oxygen. If this were so—research is required!—it would represent a connection that we do not understand and cannot grasp. The gap is too great. When Richard Dawkins observes that genes "*created* us, body and mind" (em-

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phasis added), he is appealing essentially to a magical connection. There is nothing in any precise concept of the gene that allows a set of biochemicals to create anything at all. If no precise concept of the gene is at issue, the idea that we are created by our genes, body and mind, represents a far less plausible thesis than the correlative doctrine that we are created by our Maker, body and mind.

V

"The more comprehensible the universe becomes," the physicist Steven Weinberg has written, "the more it also seems pointless." This has struck many of his readers as an ungenerous attitude, and Weinberg has subsequently made every effort to cover his comment in confusion, chiefly by affirming that he considers the universe a fine place after all.

My sympathies are with the sour and unregenerate Weinberg. The arena of the elementary particles—his arena—*is* rather a depressing place, and if it resembles anything at all, it resembles a fluorescent-lit bowling alley as seen from the interstate highway, tiny stick figures in striped bowling shirts jerking up and down in the humid night.

What *is* its point?

We humans seem to live our lives in perfect indifference to the Standard Model of particle physics. Over *there*, fields are pregnant with latent energy, particles flicker into existence and disappear, things are entangled, and no one can quite tell what is possible and what is actual, what is here and what is there, what is now and what was then. Solid forms give way. Nothing is stable. Great impassive symmetries are in control, as vacant and unchanging as the eye of Vishnu. Where they come from, no one knows. Time and space contract into some sort of agitated quantum foam. Nothing is continuous. Nothing stays the same for long—except the electrons, and they are identical, like porcelain Chinese soldiers. A pointless frenzy prevails throughout.

Over *here*, thank God, space and time are stable and continuous. Matter is what it is, and energy is what it does. There are solid and enduring shapes and forms. The sun is largely the same sun now that it was 4,000 years ago when it baked the Egyptian deserts. Changes appear slowly, but even when rapid they appear in stable patterns. There is dazzling variety throughout. The great river of time flows forward. We anticipate the future, but we remember the past. We begin knowing that we will end.

The god of the gaps may now be invited to comment—strictly as an outside observer, of course. He is addressing us, and this is what he has to say: you have *no idea* whatsoever how the ordered physical, moral, mental, aesthetic, and social world in which you live could have ever arisen from the seething anarchy of the elementary particles. It is like imagining sea foam resolving itself into the Parthenon.

And even though the god of the gaps is speaking strictly as an observer, perhaps he will be forgiven for borrowing some phraseology from the God of old and inquiring of Christopher Hitchens, who has wandered into this discussion prepared to dispute anyone at the bar: "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if thou hast understanding."

Such examples may be multiplied at will. They form a common pattern. No one has the faintest idea whether, in particular, the immense gap between what is living and what is not, between the organic and the inorganic, may be crossed by any conceivable means. That must be why the National Academy of Sciences has taken pains to affirm that it has *already* been crossed. "For those who are studying aspects of the origin of life," the Academy has proclaimed, "the question no longer seems to be whether life could have originated by chemical processes involving nonbiological components but, rather, what pathway might have been followed."

Unfortunately for the Academy, the view among biochemists actively engaged in research is different. "The de-novo appearance of oligonucleotides [some of the indispensable building blocks of life] on the primitive earth," Gerald F. Joyce and Leslie Orgel write in a volume entitled *The RNA World*, "would have been a near-miracle." A near-miracle is a term of art. It is like a near-miss. The theories that we have in our possession do what they can do, and then they stop. They do not stop because a detail is missing; they stop because we cannot go on.

Writing about the eye in *On the Origin of Species*, Darwin confessed that its emergence troubled him greatly. He was nonetheless able to resolve his doubts in his own favor. Ever since then, biologists have wrongly assumed that inasmuch as Darwin proposed a solution, they need not face a problem.

The solution that Darwin proposed and defended was to point to countless examples of intermediate visual structures scattered throughout the animal kingdom. His argument was interesting, but it did not touch the central issue. The eye is not simply a biological organ, although surely it is that. It is a biological organ that allows living creatures to

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see. If we cannot say what seeing comes to in physical or material terms, then we cannot say whether *any* theory is adequate to explain the appearance of an organ that makes sight possible.

And this is precisely what we cannot say: how the twitching nerves, chemical exchanges, electrical flashes, and computational routines of the human eye and brain provide a human being with his experiences. The *processes* involved in sight are biological, chemical, and in the end physical. It may well be that at some point in the future, a physicist, perhaps by using quantum electrodynamics, will be in a position to write down their equations. Whether such an equation will encompass our experiences—why, this is something we simply do not know.

"Today we cannot see whether Schrödinger's equation contains frogs, musical composers, or morality," Richard Feynman remarked in his lectures on turbulence. The remark has been widely quoted. It is honest. The words that follow, however, are rarely quoted: "We cannot say whether something beyond it like God is needed, or not. And so we can all hold strong opinions either way."

If we do not know whether Schrödinger's equation will one day accommodate our experience, we certainly do not know whether our experiences reflect anything less than a miracle. For the moment, if asked to stand and declare ourselves on the most elementary aspects of the world in which we live, we can say nothing.

FOR ALMOST as long as the physical sciences have made their claims about reality, poets and philosophers have observed that there is something inhuman about the undertaking represented by these sciences. They are right. We gain purchase on the physical world first by stripping it to its simplest form, and second by emptying it of its emotional content. Whatever the elementary particles may be doing, they are not forming political alliances, or eyeing each other in mute incoherent longing, or casting an anxious glance at the clock, or awaking with a start in the early hours of the morning wondering what it all means, or coming to realize that they are destined to fall like the petals of the flower leaving not a trace behind.

These are things *we* do: it is in our nature to do them. But how do we do them? By what means accessible to the imagination does a sterile and utterly insensate physical world become the garrulous, never-ending, infinitely varied, boisterous human world? The more the physical world is studied, and the richer our grasp of its principles, the greater the gap between what it represents and what we embody.

We live by love and longing, death and the devastation that time imposes. How did they enter into the world? And why? The world of the physical sciences is not our world, and if *our* world has things that cannot be explained in *their* terms, then we must search elsewhere for their explanation. We who are alive in the early 21st century may permit ourselves to deprecate the parting of the Red Sea and to regard with unconcern the various loaves and fishes mentioned in the New Testament. Yet we who are heirs to the scientific tradition have been given a priceless gift of our own: a vastly enhanced sense of the miraculous. This is something that the very greatest scientists have always known and always stressed.

We are where human beings have always been, unable to place our confidence completely in anything, unable to place our doubt completely in everything, unsure of the conveyance—and yet conveyed.

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Israel and the Palestinians: Has Bush Reneged?

Norman Podhoretz

On June 24, 2002, George W. Bush, having already become the first American President to come out openly and officially for the establishment of a Palestinian state, attached two stern conditions to that new policy. The United States, he declared, "will not support the establishment of a Palestinian state until its leaders engage in a sustained fight against the terrorists and dismantle their infrastructure." This commitment constitutes what I have called the "Fourth Pillar" of the Bush Doctrine, and many friends of Israel now believe that Bush has reneged on it.

Paul Mirengoff of the influential "Power Line" blog puts the case in precise and succinct terms:

> The Fourth Pillar has, in my view, fallen. [For] to my knowledge, the Palestinian Authority (PA) is not engaged in a sustained fight against its terrorists, nor has the Palestinian terror infrastructure been dismantled. Nonetheless, the Bush administration is working to create a Palestinian state.

Another highly regarded blogger, Rick Richman of "Jewish Current Issues," elaborates on Mirengoff's charge by pointing to what would seem to be a violation of the Road Map through which Bush's conditions for support are supposed to be implemented. He begins by quoting my own summary of the three phases of the Road Map:

> In Phase I, the Palestinians are required to "undertake visible efforts on the ground to arrest, disrupt, and restrain individuals and groups conducting and planning violent attacks on Israel anywhere," and also to mount "effective operations aimed at . . . dismantlement of terrorist capabilities and infrastructure." Only when the Palestinian Authority does this are the parties to enter Phase II, in which negotiations are supposed to culminate in "the creation of a Palestinian state with provisional borders." At that point, Phase III kicks in, and the process begins of forging a "permanent-status agreement [on] borders, Jerusalem, refugees, and settlements."

Yet, Richman writes, in the latest version of the "peace process" that was jump-started at the conference in Annapolis convened on November 27, 2007 by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Phases I and II have been skipped over, and the negotiations now going on between the Israelis and the Palestinians are entirely concerned with the issues reserved by the Road Map for Phase III. Richman then quotes me as also having promised that, if this were to happen, I would admit that I had been wrong in predicting that Bush would continue to resist pressure—including from his own State Department—to "fast-track" the Road Map by

Norman Podhoretz *is the editor-at-large of* Commentary *and the author most recently of* World War IV: The Long Struggle Against Islamofascism *(Doubleday).*

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doing precisely what he seems to have done now in getting Israel's agreement to skip the first two phases and plunge right into the third.[1]

Correctly suspecting that I still stand by that prediction, Richman challenges me to explain how I can reconcile Annapolis with the principles embedded in the Fourth Pillar and spelled out in the Road Map. In meeting that challenge, I will accordingly try to show that the Road Map has not been superseded by Annapolis and that, far from reneging on the commitment he made on June 24, 2002, Bush has in at least one key respect strengthened it in Israel's favor since the Annapolis conference was held.

TO JUDGE from much of the comment on Annapolis, there is still very little understanding of how radical a departure the June 24, 2002 statement represented from the standard conception in official Washington of what for the first two decades after 1948 had been called the "Arab-Israeli conflict" and then came to be known as the "Palestinian-Israeli conflict." I therefore want to begin with a brief rehearsal of the historical background against which the full significance of what Bush said on that fateful occasion can properly be appreciated.

Like the commonly used phrase "cycle of violence," the word "conflict" suggested, and was intended to suggest, that the two parties were equally to blame for the state of war between them. This idea served, and continues to serve, as a way of concealing or denying the plain truth, which is that the "conflict" can only be understood if seen as an ongoing Arab war against Israel.

The pattern was set in 1948-49, with the attempt by the armies of five Arab countries to strangle the infant Jewish state in its cradle, and the same objective has been pursued ever since through (depending on how you count) five or six more military campaigns. Some of these (the War of Independence of 1948, the Six-Day war of 1967, the Yom Kippur war of 1973) were waged with conventional weapons, and others (the two *intifadas* of more recent years) with various forms of terrorism. To describe all this as a "conflict" is to equate aggressions against Israel with Israel's defense of itself against those aggressions. And indeed, thanks to the Arab world's relentless political campaign to delegitimize Israel—a campaign that has gone hand in hand with the military ones—this is exactly what much of the world has consistently done. The perverted reasoning here is that if Israel has no right to exist, it follows as the night the day that Israel has no right to defend itself, either.

To be sure, the United States has never gone this far. No American President, not even Dwight D. Eisenhower, who was perhaps the least friendly to Israel of them all, ever acquiesced in the idea that Israel had no right to exist or to defend itself against attack. Even though each of them tried very hard to be, or at least to seem, "evenhanded" and to act as an "honest broker" between the warring parties, most of Eisenhower's successors were, some more and some less, and for one reason or another, sympathetic to Israel.

So, too, up until 1967, as might have been expected of people with a natural tendency to favor the underdog, was the American liberal community. After all, on the Arab side of the "Arab-Israeli conflict" stood two mighty forces yoked together by a common objective. One was the Arab nationalists to whom Israel was an alien implantation imposed by the imperialist West upon the region that belonged to them as a matter of political right. The other was the entire Muslim *umma* (or world), to which it was a violation of the will of God for a sovereign Jewish state—any Jewish state, no matter where its boundaries might be drawn—to exist on land reserved by Allah for Islam. Between them, these two forces—one secular and the other religious—numbered in the hundreds of millions, controlled more than two dozen countries and vast stretches of territory, and also had a stranglehold on global oil supplies. As for the Israeli side, it consisted in the early years of fewer than three-quarters of a million Jews living on a sliver of land that could have fit into New Jersey. Even if all the twelve million or so Jews in the entire Diaspora could be counted as active supporters (which was far from the case), Israel would still be vastly outmatched.

Then came the Six-Day war of 1967. Launched by the then Egyptian president, Gamal Abdel Nasser, with the openly declared aim of wiping Israel off the map (its very existence, he said, was an "aggression"), the war ended instead with Israel in control of the West Bank (formerly occupied by Jordan) and the Gaza Strip (which had been controlled by Egypt).[2] It was like a reenactment in modern dress of the slaying of Goliath by David.

[1] I made the prediction, and the accompanying promise, in these pages (Letters from Readers, July-August 2005) in response to a query addressed to me by an Israeli reader named Israel Pickholtz about my article "Bush, Sharon, My Daughter, and Me" (April 2005).

[2] Syria, which joined with Egypt and Jordan, also lost the Golan Heights, but the "Syrian track," which has nothing to do with the issues arising from the Fourth Pillar, is a story for another day.

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And yet, in one of the greatest achievements ever of Orwellian inversion, this humiliating defeat was eventually turned into a great victory by Arab propagandists who redefined the ongoing war of the whole Arab/Muslim world against the tiny Jewish state as a struggle between the conquered Palestinians and the all-powerful Israelis. In this new scheme of things, it was the Palestinians who were cast in the role of David and the Israelis who became Goliath. Thus did the vastly outnumbered and besieged Jewish state lose much of the sympathy—especially on the Left—that it had always enjoyed before.

What George W. Bush did in his June 24 statement was to set this Orwellian inversion right side up. Not only did he reconstruct a truthful framework by telling the Palestinian people that they had been treated for decades by the Arab nations "as pawns in the Middle East conflict." He was also open and forthright about these nations and about what they had been up to:

> I've said in the past that nations are either with us or against us in the war on terror. To be counted on the side of peace, nations must act. Every leader actually committed to peace will end incitement to violence in official media and publicly denounce homicide bombs. Every nation actually committed to peace will stop the flow of money, equipment, and recruits to terrorists groups seeking the destruction of Israel, including Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Hizballah. Every nation committed to peace must block the shipment of Iranian supplies to these groups and oppose regimes that promote terror, like Iraq. And Syria must choose the right side in the war on terror by closing terrorist camps and expelling terrorist organizations.

Here, then, Bush restored the broad context in which to understand the narrower Middle East "conflict." It was not, he insisted, a war between Israel and the Palestinians, but rather a war against Israel being waged by the surrounding Arab/Muslim states, currently through terrorist proxies. Most of these proxies were Palestinian but they also included Hizballah, which was supported and controlled by Iran.

Nor did Bush stop there. Although he made an effort toward the end of his statement to seem even-handed by challenging Israel "to take concrete steps to support the emergence of a viable, credible Palestinian state," he most emphatically did not follow the usual practice of blaming the persistence of the "conflict" on "Israeli intransigence." On the contrary: he squarely and unambiguously placed the onus on the Palestinian leaders and the Arab states backing them up. By saying up front that "There is simply no way to achieve . . . peace until all parties fight terror," he was blaming the absence of peace on the Arab states and the "Palestinian authorities" (who were "encouraging, not opposing, terrorism") and exonerating the Israelis (who were being "victimized by terrorists," not supporting them).

Furthermore, Bush eschewed the usual practice of demanding that Israel take the first steps toward peace by making unilateral concessions. That responsibility he assigned not to the "Palestinian leaders" alone but also to "the entire Arab world," which he called upon "to build closer ties of diplomacy and commerce with Israel, leading to full normalization of relations" with the Jewish state.

It was an extraordinary statement, and it is no wonder that the Israelis themselves, and their American friends, greeted it with great enthusiasm. Yet only about a year later, upon the publication of the "Road Map to a Permanent Two-State Solution to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," elation began giving way to alarm. This document was supposed to be a blueprint for implementing the principles of the June 24 speech, but the very fact that it had been produced by a so-called Quartet (the U.S., the UN, the EU, and Russia) was enough to arouse suspicion and cause apprehension. Given that three of the four members of the Quartet were hardly known for friendliness toward Israel, and that the U.S. contingent was made up of the State Department, how could this entity be expected to resist undermining the principles of Bush's June 24 speech while pretending to show how they should be put into practice? Surely the drafters of the Road Map would either ignore the President's tacit repudiation of the cult of moral equivalency, otherwise known as "evenhandedness" and at whose shrine the Arabists in the State Department worshiped, or else they would find a way to sneak it back in.

And indeed, this is precisely what was charged by critics of the Road Map like Abraham Sofaer (who actually used the word "evenhanded" in characterizing it); Daniel Pipes ("the Road Map might be thought of as the State Department's belated answer to the President's June 2002 proposal"); and Robert Satloff and David Makovsky (who argued that the Road Map represented not the fulfillment but "the antithesis of Bush's June 24 vision for peacemaking in terms of substance, sequence, and procedure").

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Perhaps the worst of the many discrepancies they all found was the egregious example of "even-handedness" that Satloff described as the "sham, even indecent, parallelism between Palestinian and Israeli behavior." Summarizing Satloff's documentation of this point, Joshua Muravchik wrote that the Road Map

> calls on each side, in virtually identical language, to "cease violence" against the other, as if acts of terror and counterterror are commensurable. It also balances a demand that "official Palestinian institutions end incitement against Israel" with one that "official Israeli institutions end incitement against Palestinians."

At first, I found these criticisms entirely persuasive. As time went on, however, I gradually came to the conclusion that, despite the best efforts of the drafters of the document in the State Department, and contrary to what they probably imagined they had pulled off, they had failed to eliminate the most radical feature of the President's June 24, 2002 statement—namely, its insistence on putting the onus on the Palestinians in particular and the Arab world in general.

Of course the State Department drafters made sure to place as much emphasis as they could get away with on the concluding section of the speech in which the President had reiterated the usual demands on Israel to do its part by "freezing settlement activity in the occupied territories"; by "permitting innocent Palestinians to resume work and normal life"; and by pulling its military forces out of areas heavily populated by Palestinians. Still, and in spite of this bone the President had thrown to the cult of "evenhandedness," the drafters of the Road Map simply could not maneuver their way around the fact that he had made these demands on Israel contingent in the first place upon Palestinian action against terrorism. Absent such action, the parties would be stuck in Phase I of the Road Map. This meant that the negotiations toward a Palestinian state with "provisional borders" that were reserved for Phase II would continue to be deferred, with the "permanent status" negotiations of Phase III indefinitely put off beyond the original target date of 2004-05.

It would be hard to pinpoint the moment when it dawned on the members of the Quartet that the Road Map had failed to take the ball out of the Palestinian court into which Bush had thrown it. But no sooner had they come to this realization than they began trying to disown what they themselves had wrought. Knowing all too well how unlikely it was that the Palestinians—even now that Yasir Arafat had died and been replaced as president of the Palestinian Authority by the supposedly moderate Mahmoud Abbas—would meet their obligation under Phase I to put an end to terrorism, the Quartet took refuge in the position that the only way forward was to "fast-track" the Road Map.

It was around this time that I made the promise of which Rick Richman now reminds me. Having already indicated that I am not ready to admit that I was wrong about Bush (or, for that matter, about Ariel Sharon), let me now try to explain why in greater detail.

IT IS TRUE that both Bush and the Israeli government agreed at Annapolis to enter into the "final status" negotiations that, according to the Road Map, are not supposed to begin until Phase III is reached. But it is also true that neither party has allowed itself to be bamboozled into forgetting about Phase I. Thus in the speech he gave on January 10, 2008 during his visit to Jerusalem, Bush made sure to reaffirm in unmistakable terms that "implementation of any agreement is subject to implementation of the Road Map." For the Palestinians, he said, this required "confronting terrorists and dismantling terrorist infrastructure," and he also said yet again that American support for a Palestinian state depended upon the fulfillment of that condition ("No agreement and no Palestinian state will be born of terror").

Picking up on that reaffirmation, the Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, as reported recently in the *Jerusalem Post*,

> stressed that any agreement reached with the Palestinians would be subject to the implementation of their Road Map commitments. . . . Livni made it clear that without changes on the ground, there would be no Palestinian state. "The road to a Palestinian state goes through renunciation of violence and terrorism, responding to the situation in Gaza, and being more effective in the West Bank," the foreign minister said. "This is a part of Annapolis and something the United States supports deeply."

But to the critics of Annapolis this raises another question: if any final-status agreement that may be reached in the current round of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians will have to be shelved until such time as they fulfill their obligations under Phase I, why bother trying to reach

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such an agreement now? To which Bush and Rice reply that it will give the Palestinian people new hope by presenting them with a clear "vision" of what they can expect if they follow the (putative) way of Abbas instead of the way of Hamas. If they choose the path of the Road Map, they will be rewarded with a sovereign democratic state of their own that will live alongside Israel in peace and prosperity, whereas the jihadist route of Hamas will lead them to nothing but endless war, and the chaos, poverty, and oppression that they can already see in Gaza under Hamas's control.

As against this justification for the Annapolis process, Zalman Shoval, who once served as the Israeli ambassador to the United States, mounts a powerful set of arguments. Apart from the many other things he finds wrong with Annapolis, Shoval contends that in itself a "shelf agreement" would be bad for Israel. For even if implementation of such an agreement—which will necessarily involve highly controversial concessions by Israel—is made to wait upon the cessation of terrorism, it will still become the starting point of (so to speak) the "real" final-status negotiations in Phase III, where Israel will be pressed to make even more, and more dangerous, concessions.

In my opinion, Shoval is right in the abstract, but the actual chance that Phase III will be reached in the near future is close to zero. Even on the generous assumption that Mahmoud Abbas really does wish to forswear terrorism, he is far too weak to make that wish come true—not on the West Bank (where he as the head of the Fatah party retains control but which, if not for the presence of the Israeli army, Hamas would long since have taken over as it has Gaza), let alone in Gaza itself (where the grip of Hamas is so tight that some have taken to calling the place Hamastan). Nor could the current Israeli government under Ehud Olmert survive if he were to try implementing an agreement that would, at a minimum, involve ceding East Jerusalem to the Palestinians as the capital of their new state.

In short, so long as Hamas, and factions like the al-Aqsa brigade within Abbas's own Fatah party, refuse to give up on terrorism, and so long as they go on pursuing the dream of ridding the Middle East of a Jewish state, the Fourth Pillar will remain standing. Which means that the "shelf agreement," even assuming it is reached, is destined to molder on the shelf until it winds up in the same mass grave in which the innumerable "peace plans" that preceded it have found their ignominious resting place.

But if his speech in Jerusalem demonstrates that Bush has not reneged on the commitment that constitutes the Fourth Pillar of the Bush Doctrine, it also shows that, far from weakening that commitment, he has strengthened its promise to ensure that Israel's security will not be jeopardized by the establishment of a Palestinian state.

As originally proffered in the June 24, 2002 statement, this promise was formulated in the following terms:

> [T]he Israeli occupation that began in 1967 will be ended with a settlement negotiated between the parties, based on UN Resolutions 242 and 338, with Israeli withdrawal to secure and recognized borders.

Then, in a letter he sent to Sharon on April 14, 2004, Bush went farther:

> In light of new realities on the ground, including already existing major Israeli populations centers, it is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of final-status negotiations will be a full and complete return to the armistice lines of 1949. . . . It is realistic to expect that any final-status agreement will only be achieved on the basis of mutually agreed changes that reflect these realities.

Translated into plain English, this meant that Israel would not be required to retreat all the way to the pre-'67 borders or to dismantle the major settlement blocs in Judea and Samaria.

True, Bush's parallel insistence on a "contiguous" Palestinian state also meant that Israel would have to withdraw from the Jordan Valley. As Dore Gold of the Jerusalem Center for Policy Analysis never tired of demonstrating, to abandon this strategically vital piece of geography would leave Israel naked to attack on the ground. The demand was thus raised by Gold and others for "defensible borders," which became code words for the retention by Israel of a military presence in the Jordan Valley.

Initially, the Bush administration did not look with favor upon this demand ("It's not going to happen," declared a White House official). But then, in his speech in Jerusalem on January 10 of this year, Bush signaled a change that has gone curiously unnoticed by friends of Israel:

> These negotiations must ensure that Israel has secure, recognized, and *defensible* borders. And they must ensure that the state of Palestine is viable, contiguous, sovereign, and independent. [emphasis added]

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By adding for the first time the word "defensible" to the "secure and recognized borders" he had specified in his previous statements, Bush was for all practical purposes endorsing continued Israeli control over the Jordan Valley; and by reiterating that the Palestinian state must be "contiguous," he was saying that, contrary to Palestinian objections, a way could be found to reconcile these two requirements.

At this point, Paul Mirengoff raises another question. Even if, he says, I am right about Bush's continued commitment to the Fourth Pillar, will it survive his departure from office?

Well, it would be foolish to deny that the odds are against this. Even so, I believe there are reasonable grounds for—shall we say?—the audacity of hope on this issue, especially if John McCain becomes our next President, but even if either Hillary Clinton or Barack Obama does.

CONSIDER AS a precedent what happened to a comparable commitment made to Israel—the one by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in 1974 that the United States would refuse to deal with the PLO unless and until it first disavowed the articles in its charter calling for the destruction of the Jewish state and then agreed to extend recognition to it. Less than two years later, Jimmy Carter became President. There is little doubt that he himself and his secretary of state, Cyrus Vance (not to mention his National Security Adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski), would have been all too happy to accept the PLO's claim to being the "sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people" and to deal with it on that basis. Nevertheless, when it was discovered that Andrew Young, Carter's ambassador to the UN, had secretly met with a PLO official (which very likely he did with the knowledge and approval of Vance, Brzezinski, and perhaps the President himself), there was such an outcry from the Israelis, their American friends, and all others to whom this violation of a solemn commitment besmirched the honor of the United States that Young had to resign.

The Reagan administration that followed in 1981 came under great pressure from the international community to end the American boycott of the PLO. But for nearly eight full years Reagan and his secretary of state, George Shultz, gamely held on to the Kissinger commitment. Not until its last weeks in office, and only after being persuaded by a speech delivered by Arafat on December 14, 1988 that the PLO had finally met the conditions spelled out by Kissinger, did the Reagan administration give in by authorizing a "dialogue" between the U.S. ambassador to Tunisia and the PLO representatives there.[3]

This helped set the stage for George H.W. Bush (who succeeded Reagan) and James Baker (who succeeded Shultz) to convene a "peace" conference in Madrid to which they wanted to invite the PLO. Yet the problem was that the then Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Shamir, did not agree with the American interpretation of Arafat's speech as having truly met the Kissinger conditions. Consequently, Bush and Baker could persuade the Israelis to attend the Madrid conference only by assuring them that the Palestinians being invited were not representatives of the PLO. This piece of diplomatic legerdemain worked to the extent of making the conference possible, but it did not and could not work to make anything much happen there.

The decisive turning point came after Shamir was ousted by a Labor government with Yitzhak Rabin as prime minister and Shimon Peres as foreign minister. Unlike Shamir's Likud party, Labor was champing at the bit to "trade territory for peace." In fact, without (so far as we know) a single push from the U.S. (now with Bill Clinton as President), Peres, a hawk turned dove, saw Madrid and raised it with Oslo, where with his active encouragement an Israeli team was conducting negotiations with the PLO. These negotiations were kept secret not only from the public but (again so far as we know) even from the still hawkish Rabin—who, however, soon persuaded himself that it would be the better part of political prudence to get with the program.[4]

This having been accomplished, the long journey that had begun at Madrid and had proceeded from there to Oslo finally wound up on the White House lawn. There, under the beaming gaze of Bill Clinton, Rabin overcame his visible misgivings and shook the hand of Yasir Arafat, a hand still dripping with Jewish blood and—notwithstanding his universally acclaimed metamorphosis from arch-terrorist into responsible statesman—soon to be dripping with even more as Oslo brought not peace to Israel but a continued string of terrorist attacks.

The crucially important point to grasp is that it

[3] The late Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, who had served as Reagan's ambassador to the UN in his first term, was sharply critical of this move on the ground that Arafat's speech had done no such thing ("How the PLO Was Legitimized," COMMENTARY, July 1989).

[4] There has been much speculation as to why Rabin changed his mind. My own theory is set forth at length in "Israel and the United States: A Complex History" (May 1998).

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was the Israeli government, acting on its own initiative and not in response to American pressure, that gave birth to Oslo. No American administration would have dared to demand that Israel do this much this fast—not even the unfriendly one run by Bush and Baker. Indeed, for demanding a lot less, they had been widely accused of bigotry.

BUT THE Oslo agreements proved to be only the first time Israel would get ahead of America in its dealings with the Palestinians. The next big one came with Ariel Sharon, who became Israel's prime minister only a month after George W. Bush became President of the United States. This was the decision to effect a unilateral withdrawal from Gaza. It was reached, as Oslo had been before it, by the Israeli government all on its own—in this instance not only without American pressure but actually in defiance of it. The United States was not opposed to an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, but Washington wanted it done through negotiations, not by unilateral action. Sharon refused, and got his way.

Similarly with Annapolis. We do not know for certain who first came up with the idea of forging an agreement that would give the Palestinians a detailed picture of the great benefits they would reap by fulfilling their obligations under the Road Map. But even if, as is generally assumed, Condoleezza Rice was the author, it was Olmert who forced the pace by jumping on the idea quickly and enthusiastically. My guess is that if Olmert had instead resisted, George W. Bush might well have yielded to him. But as with Sharon and Gaza, how could Bush—notwithstanding the depth of his feeling for Israel—be more Zionist than the Israelis?

Speaking of Gaza brings up yet another challenge that Rick Richman has thrown at me. Much to his surprise—and not his alone—I supported the "disengagement" from Gaza. But, he asks, now that it has "proved to have been a strategic disaster of the first order for both Israel and the United States," am I willing to admit that I wrong about Sharon as well as about Bush?

In taking up this second challenge, I have to begin by explaining that I did not see disengagement as a concession to the Palestinians or as an example of trading land for peace. Like Sharon, I did not believe that peace could be negotiated with the Palestinians in the foreseeable future (because if Abbas was only "Arafat Lite" or "Arafat with a suit," he would never follow the Road Map to its final destination, while if he was truly willing to do so, he was too weak to pull the Palestinian people behind him).[5] Like Sharon, too, I also thought that peace would come not through anything Israel were to do or fail to do, but only when the Arab/Muslim world in general, and the Palestinians in particular, made their own inner peace with the existence of a Jewish state in the Middle East and gave up trying to destroy it.

In the meantime, it seemed to me a good idea for Israel to take matters into its own hands. This entailed figuring out how it could best position itself to fend off external attack while at the same time protecting its internal security as a Jewish state through a maximum degree of separation from the Palestinians. Seen in *this* light, the disengagement from Gaza revealed itself as only one part of a prudent strategic retreat to a more defensible perimeter. The second part was the security fence being built around the West Bank, and the third was the inclusion on the Israeli side of the fence of the large settlement blocs in Judea and Samaria (as agreed to by the United States in Bush's letter to Sharon of April 14, 2004).

Obviously I could not foresee that Sharon would be felled by a stroke and that Ehud Olmert would be left to follow through on his strategy. Nor did I anticipate the takeover of Gaza by the terrorists of Hamas. Nor in any of the wildest worst-case scenarios I could conjure up did it ever occur to me that, in the aftermath of disengagement, an Israeli government—any Israeli government—would sit by passively while missiles were being fired day after day from Gaza into Sderot or any other patch of Israeli territory.

If I had envisaged such a state of affairs, I would not have supported disengagement. But then again, I cannot for the life of me imagine Sharon behav-

[5] To judge from an interview he recently gave to *al-Dustur*, a Jordanian daily, Abbas is more "Arafat Lite" than a new species of Palestinian leader who has renounced terrorism and is intent on making peace with Israel. Thus, as reported in the *Jerusalem Post*, he told *al-Dustur* that "he does not rule out returning to the path of armed 'resistance' against Israel." He went on to say that "he was opposed to an armed struggle against Israel—for the time being. 'At this present juncture, I am opposed to armed struggle because we cannot succeed in it, but maybe in the future things will be different.'" In the same interview, the *Jerusalem Post* reports, "The PA president also expressed pride both in himself and in his organization, Fatah, for trailblazing the path of resistance: 'I had the honor of firing the first shot in 1965 and of being the one who taught resistance to many in the region and around the world: what it's like; when it is effective and when it isn't effective; its uses; and what serious, authentic, and influential resistance is. It is common knowledge when and how resistance is detrimental and when it is well timed. We [Fatah] had the honor of leading the resistance and we taught resistance to everyone, including Hizballah, who trained in our military camps.'"

This rationale for a tactical pause in terrorism does not exactly amount to a ringing renunciation of it.

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ing as Olmert has done. More likely, with no Jews left to protect in Gaza, he would have felt free—and totally justified from both a military and a moral point of view—to hit back with overwhelming force the minute the Kassams started flying.

AND SO I come to one more challenge—the third and last—that Rick Richman has posed to me in asking what I would recommend that Israel do now about Gaza and about the Fourth Pillar.

On Gaza: I find it incredible that the Olmert government has for so long been incapable of discharging the most elementary responsibility any government has of protecting its people against attack, and even more incredible that, in spite of this dereliction, Olmert remains in office. If he can be pressed into doing what I believe Sharon would have done, and doing it soon, or if he can be replaced with someone—Bibi Netanyahu? Ehud Barak?—who has the guts and the competence to do it, the situation would surely change for the better.

On the future of the Fourth Pillar: taken together, Bush's statements of June 24, 2002, April 14, 2004, and January 10, 2008 constitute a solemn commitment that has been made to the state of Israel not by a passing administration but by the United States of America. Consequently, if the Israelis (backed up by their American friends, and anyone else who cares about the honor of the United States) bind themselves to this commitment with hoops of steel, the next President may very well have no choice but to abide by it—just as Carter was reluctantly forced to do with the Kissinger commitment of 1974.

These are, I know, two very large "if's." But to Rick Richman, Paul Mirengoff, and many others in both Israel and America who agree with them, I would say this: that the count is very far from in, and that the day may yet come when it is they who will be challenged to admit that they were wrong about the durability of the Fourth Pillar of the Bush Doctrine, and conceivably—just conceivably—even about the three-part strategy of Ariel Sharon.

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Roughnecking It

R. R. Reno

THE BEER was thin and tepid. I'm not sure what brand I was drinking, but it really didn't matter much. In 1980, Coors was the outer edge of exotic, and beer ran from pale to paler. Bruce had drifted over to the other side of the loud, crowded barroom. I caught his eye and motioned to see if he wanted another one. He smiled and shook his head no. I scanned the room for signs of Bob, but he was nowhere to be found. Probably out in the back parking lot smoking pot with somebody. Bob was predictable. I ordered myself another beer.

The Flamingo is a large bar, or at least it was until the oil boom eventually went bust in one of the many downturns that give Wyoming its windswept impermanence. I managed to find a seat at the bar along with the other long-haired and ill-shaven guys wearing Carhartts, the Okie-from-Muskogee-goes-to-Haight-Ashbury look that Willie Nelson perfected. The place buzzed while a less than professional band did covers of Marshall Tucker and Lynyrd Skynyrd.

It was a Friday, maybe a Saturday night. I had been working on an oil rig outside of Rawlins for three months. The gas crisis of the 70's had triggered a boom in domestic oil exploration, and I was dipping my straw into the surging current of cash that had brought nearly all the men in the Flamingo that night—and it was pretty much only men—to Wyoming.

Behind me guys pressed forward for drinks. It felt good to swim in the swift and raw currents of a workingman's world flooded with money. I remembered getting my first paycheck on a late Friday afternoon. The drilling rig was more than an hour from town, and all the banks were closed by the time we'd returned. But my boss assured me that I could go to any bar and cash an oil-field check. So late the next morning I did. The manager told me that he had to charge me a dollar per hundred cashed. I assented, and he counted out ten $100 bills and some tens and singles. It was the first time in my life that I had ever held a $100 bill.

Weeks had rolled by, and paychecks were cashed, and on this night in the Flamingo I was feeling flush and complacent. I was an oil-field roughneck out with his buddies. The place was filling. Voices were loud and urgent with a weekend lust for good times. A guy knocked against me as he squeezed his way toward the bar. My beer spilled. A little got on him, and he glowered at me as if it had been my fault. "Sorry," I said, and I ordered another, and one for him as well just to show that I was a good guy. When mine came, I turned the glass slowly around in the small pool of foam that slid down its sides. Vacant in alcoholic relaxation and filled with inward satisfaction from my repose in the fraternity of the rigs, I drifted slowly into myself.

R. R. RENO *contributed "Faith in the Flesh" to our November 2007 issue. He is a professor of theology at Creighton University and features editor of* First Things.

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I HAD KNOWN nothing of oil rigs and roughnecks growing up in Towson, Maryland, a pleasant suburb of Baltimore. Lacrosse stick in my hand from an early age, I never signed up for Little League baseball. I should have gone to play for Princeton or Cornell or Brown, and then on to Salomon Brothers or law school. But I was deflected. By age eighteen, a teenage fascination with rock climbing came to predominate. I think it was one of my sister's friends who gave me the push. "If you want to be a rock climber," he told me, or at least my memory tells me, "you really have to go to Yosemite." In September 1978, instead of going off to college, I hitchhiked west to Yosemite, the place climbers simply call "the Valley."

A couple of weeks turned into the better part of a year. Eager, I soon became accomplished. Two weeks after arriving I had climbed El Capitan. By the end of the spring, as I piled up ascent after ascent, the small, informal, but rigorously elite group of top climbers quietly inducted me into their company. When the legendary Jim Bridwell came over to my campsite, wanting to know what I thought of this or that move on some particularly intimidating route of his, it was like being touched on the head by the king's sword.

But I was not the typical climbing bum stretching a few bucks to stay for another week. I had arrived in Yosemite with Richard Feynman's *Lectures on Physics* in my backpack, as well as Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*. The force that had pressed me away from the college classroom worked against an equal and opposite pressure. By May I was out of money, and I was dimly aware that I could not hang from rock faces forever.

Three months later, my father dropped me off at Haverford College, a wonderful monastery of establishment liberalism that eventually educated me as it had my father and would my brother and, briefly, one of my sisters. But my soul was divided. During my freshman year I was as much on the rocks as in the classroom, at least in my heart. Even lacrosse, that old passion, and girls, a new or at least newly requited one, failed to break the spell. And so at the end of the year I asked the dean for a leave of absence.

My parents were not pleased, though they mounted no sustained protests. In late July 1979, when my efforts to find work in Baltimore to finance yet another round of rock-climbing adventure yielded little, I asked a friend to give me a start on my hitchhike west. He dropped me off a few miles out of town on I-70. I had about $500 in my pocket, a plan to go to the Tetons, and a few peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches prepared for me by my mom.

My backpack was overloaded with garish red and purple nylon climbing ropes and all the shiny gear that clinks and clanks around climbers as they work their way up the rock. In a series of providentially coordinated rides—twice, drivers used their CB radios to arrange seamless transfers at rest areas—I rocketed west toward the mountains. An Army cook on leave picked me up just west of Chicago. He drove eighty miles an hour to get to his girlfriend in Omaha as my mind raced in anticipation of grand ascents. Then, as I stood by I-80 near Grand Island, Nebraska, exhaustion led the "The Fat Man" (his very accurate CB handle) to stop and, a hundred or so miles later, turn over to me the wheel of his pickup while he snored the night away and I drove straight through to Rock Springs sustained by his cache of Diet RC Cola.

A couple of rides later, I made it to the American Alpine Club Climber's Ranch in the Tetons less than three days after leaving Baltimore. I couldn't have driven faster on my own. As a bonus, after my sandwiches ran out, the guys who gave me rides had bought me meals. I spent exactly nothing to travel 2,000 miles.

The good fortune was a harbinger. Rick Lui, who had run the Climber's Ranch in the Tetons for at least a decade, knew my type—eager and poorly financed—and he winked as I slept in the woods on the sly. But a day or two after I got there, Bill Nicholson unexpectedly arrived. I knew Bill from my year in Yosemite. He and I would sit by the campfire and talk about how much we wanted to find our way to the big mountains of Alaska. It's one thing to test oneself on the rock faces in the western sunshine; it's another to make one's way across glaciers and up ice-covered slopes.

We climbed the east face of Teewinot together. Sharing a can of sardines on the summit, with the towering north face of the Grand Teton standing sentinel to the southwest, he turned to me. "Rusty," he said, "we've just got to get up to Canada." Picking the last crumbled sardine carcass out of the mustard sauce, I agreed. The next day, as August began, we were driving over Teton Pass and heading north.

Bill's 1965 VW van strained at 50 miles per hour, and the cream-colored dashboard had no radio. Time and silence made for long conversations. But sharing the cost of gas drained me quickly, and by the end of the month my wallet was empty. I think it was on the plains of Alberta, on the way back south, under a boiling ocean of low hanging clouds

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that made the endless fields and empty roads seem small and lifeless, that Bill recommended Rawlins as the place to restore my finances. "Just go the Ferris Hotel downtown," he told me, "and ask the desk clerk if any of the drilling crews need a hand. The pay is fantastic, and they're always looking for somebody." It seemed impossibly precise and vague at the same time, but since Bill was driving through Rawlins on his way back to Denver, I thought I would give it a shot.

THE FERRIS was an old-style, downtown hotel. A few years ago, when I drove through Rawlins again, it was shuttered, like, it seemed, half the town, but even then the Ferris was not exactly flourishing. Built in the 1950's during the uranium- and iron-mining boom, it was far from the interstate exits that have sucked commerce out of the old town centers throughout the West and Midwest. Four or five stories of utilitarian beige brick were topped by an impressive neon sign that depicted a steam shovel and spelled out the hotel's name. The lobby featured linoleum, blonde wood, and formica. The day I walked in, two or three old men were sitting in low, vinyl-covered chairs repaired by clear packing tape, silently reading newspapers and magazines.

I had $10 in my pocket, and I knew absolutely nothing about drilling for oil. And I had never had much luck finding jobs. I think I tended to be too ambivalent, unable to project the impression, for example, that I was unaccountably eager and strikingly qualified to wash dishes or paint houses or be a paralegal. To my amazement, when I asked the expressionless woman at the front desk if she knew of a drilling crew that needed a hand, she said, "Yes." She went over to a bulletin board beside the rows of small shelves that contained room keys on rings tagged with duct tape. Carefully removing a torn-off edge of paper, she gave it to me without a word. On it was written, in a very uneven cursive, "Chain hand needed. Call Kenny. 544-7182."

I had no idea what chain hand meant. The booming oil fields were always in need of workers, Bill had emphasized, but he hadn't been very specific. As I studied the note, the woman was sizing me up. I was not the first fresh-faced young man that rumors of well-paying labor had brought to her front desk, and she drew the accurate conclusion that I was a hopeless tenderfoot. Sensing my paralyzing uncertainty, she put me in motion. "Pay phone's over there," she said, gesturing to her left.

The phone call was brief and to the point. "You got any rig experience?" "No." "None?" "None, sir." Long silence. "You willin' to work hard?" "Yes, sir." Shorter silence, and then a voice, growling in concession to necessity, said: "Be ready at seven tomorrow morning in front of the Ferris."

It did not seem more possible just because it had become real. Five minutes in Rawlins and broke, a help-wanted ad of the most informal sort, one very brief phone interview, and the next thing I knew I had a job making more money than I could ever have imagined possible. A double shift here and there would bring two weeks' pay close to $1,500—a fabulous sum for a twenty-year-old in 1980.

But it wasn't just the money that made the job so remarkable. The oil-field managers in their four-wheel-drive Suburbans with the company logo on the side made more money. For that matter, the owner of the Flamingo bar made much more money, to say nothing of oil-company shareholders, or Wall Street bankers who brokered investments and traded futures, or Saudi princes who engineered the oil crisis of the 70's that stimulated the domestic boom in oil exploration that had drawn me into its frothy Wyoming ventures in the first place.

I was none of these, but it didn't matter, because I very quickly came to glory in my newfound identity. Roughnecks work in small, five-man crews on the front lines of an oil patch. They tend to be a high-spirited group with devil-may-care attitudes. We were the tip of the vast money-making spear. We felt it. The town knew it. An on-again, off-again college kid from a quiet Baltimore suburb, I had never heard of roughnecks, and I had no experience with any other kind of clubby and self-confident workingman's mentality. But there I was. Pushed off the normal path from home to college to career by a passion for rock climbing, I had accidentally found my way into an elite corps of the industrial revolution.

A DRILLING RIG is a massive platform of machinery that sits about two stories above the ground. The floor of the rig itself is about the size of a living room, flanked at the back by two or three monstrous engines the size of large vans, and fronted by a long metal slide that reaches down to lengths of drilling pipe stored at ground level. Along one side of the rig platform is attached a narrow metal building that looks like a suspended mobile office. With droll self-knowledge, roughnecks call this place of occasional refuge the doghouse. The other side has stairs and catwalks that provide access to a tangle of pipes and pumps. Over the rig floor soars the derrick, a 150-foot superstructure of steel that supports various cranes and pulleys.

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The purpose of a drilling rig is to bore a hole in the ground to tap reservoirs of oil below the surface. To do so, machinery is set up to function like a giant power drill, twisting a bit that bores ever more deeply into the earth's crust. The huge engines turn the drilling pipe that runs from the center of the platform down and into the ground.

Things get complicated, however, because the hole being drilled is very deep. In the first place, all the stuff being ground up by the drill bit, the "tool," needs to come up and out of the hole; otherwise, the tool will eventually seize up in the endlessly pulverized stuff at the bottom of the hole. The bits in ordinary hand drills have a spiraling indentation to guide wood or metal shavings out of the hole. But this does not work if the hole is deep. So the oil-drilling rig is set up to pump a thick, silicon-conditioned mud down the hollow center of the drill pipe and out through jets in the tool. The mass of pipes and pumps to the side of the drilling rig are devoted to this purpose, and if all functions well, the pressurized mud brings the tailings up and out of the hole. Roughnecks spend a fair amount of time doing the tedious work of preparing the mud and managing the system that circulates it through the hole. There is no romance in this work.

The depth of the hole creates a further problem. If you need to make a six-inch-deep hole in a piece of wood, then you can run out to Home Depot and buy a drill bit long enough to penetrate. But what if you want to drill a ten-foot hole—or a ten-thousand-foot hole? You need to find a way to stop and add extenders as the bit presses downward. On the drilling rig, this is accomplished by fixing the tool to 33-foot sections of drill pipe. Every time the drilling reaches down a full length of pipe, the rig boss, called the driller, stops the spinning table at the center of the rig. The rest of the crew assembles to hoist the next section of pipe up the ramp and add it to the string that reaches down into the hole. Once the new pipe section is attached, the spinning process starts again, and the drilling resumes. It is a moment of genuine urgency and concentration. The cranes go into motion. Engines roar. The roughnecks take their place on the rig floor to manipulate the drill pipe.

BUT IT'S only a moment. The bigger problem with deep drilling is what makes the job of roughneck hard, dirty, dangerous— and heroic. Even though drilling tools cost tens of thousands of dollars because they are tipped with industrial diamonds, they wear out every few days and need to be replaced. Here physics and finances conspire. Getting a tool out of the ground when it is 10,000 feet below the surface involves pulling a seemingly endless amount of drill pipe up and out. Piece by piece, the long string needs to be broken apart. The pipe is then set aside to be reassembled as the new tool is sent back down to restart the drilling.

This process of pulling out the tool, replacing it, and then sending it back down the hole is called tripping, as in "taking the tool for a round trip." The trip must be done as quickly as possible, because when the tool is not pushing downward toward its profitable destination, the oil company is still paying thousands of dollars a day to keep the rig on the site and the crew on the job.

The need for rapid replacement of the tool is why the derrick rises up so high. When tripping out of the hole, the roughnecks keep the 33-foot pieces of drill pipe in larger, 100-foot chunks. These longer sections are twisted off the string and leaned against the derrick for efficient reassembly. As the tool comes out, the stack of drill pipe grows. Even from a distance you can tell when a rig is tripping, because a great bulk of recently removed drill pipe fills the otherwise delicate metal superstructure of the derrick. It can take an entire eight-hour shift to pull a couple of miles of drill pipe out of the ground, and another whole shift to put it back in.

When tripping, roughnecks work at a rapid pace. Thousands of pounds of metal equipment are thrown into a carefully choreographed process. The derrick hand takes his place, strapped in 100 feet above the rig floor to manage the tops of the 100-foot lengths. The driller mans the controls along the side of the engines, barking orders and throwing levers that work the various cranes, chains, and machines that manipulate the many tons of drill pipe that need to be taken out and then put back into the hole. Three workers—the "motorman," the "chain hand," and the "worm"—stand at the center of the drilling platform, breaking apart the joints in the drill pipe on the way out and remaking them on the way back in.

The drill pipe is joined together when the male end of the pipe is screwed into the female end. It sounds straightforward. But making and breaking joints is complicated when 100 feet of drill pipe the thickness of a man's thigh swings from a crane high above the rig floor. It is also complicated by the fact that the drilling process has tightened the joints. To break apart these lengths of pipe, the rig is equipped with giant tongs that are counterweighted so that the motorman and worm can attach them above and below the joints in opposing directions. The tongs function like eight-foot-long pipe wrenches.

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I was the worm. The rig culture had not been troubled by sensitivity training. I don't think Kenny, my driller, ever called me by my given name. His face deeply lined by a lifetime of outdoor work, he always growled at me, "Worm." Or more likely, "Damn worm." My name came from my place on the drilling platform while tripping. I worked worm's corner, the back side of the drilling floor that is flanked by the giant engines. This is where the beginner begins, not because the other jobs require all that much more skill or experience, but because worm's corner is the most dangerous and dirty and exhausting place when the rig is in full action.

As the crew trips, the engines thunder and cables shudder until the joints of the drill pipe finally break free. All the power of the rig pulls in the direction of worm's corner. Because of his position between the drill pipe at the center of the platform and the engines behind, if the worm's tong breaks under the strain, or if a cable snaps, the metal crashes toward him. Working worm's corner feels like standing by the fence of the sharpest curve of a Formula One race watching the cars scream toward you, and hoping that everybody makes the turn.

My first safety lesson came when I held my tong in place as the engines reached toward their highest pitch. A standing worm will be cut in half by a broken cable whipped back by the pulling motors. "Crouch, you goddamned worm," Kenny screamed at me over the din of the motors. So I crouched. As the cable at the end of my tong snapped tight and I felt an unimaginable force pulse through the tong I was now holding above me with my head bowed and my face instinctively averted, I had no difficulty seeing Kenny's wisdom.

The crouching position may promote safety, but it brings discomfort. Most worn-out tools clog, and the mud remains trapped in the stack of pipe that has just been drawn up and out of the hole and now towers above the rig floor. When the joint breaks free, the mud rushes out. Every trip dumps hundreds of gallons onto the drilling platform. And since that tong must be held in place as the massive cable pulls back to break the joint, I was always right there as the mud spilled out. On any given trip, I was quickly soaked to the skin. Thus did I merit my muddy name.

My second safety lesson came very quickly after the first. As the mud pours out of the drill pipe held above the rig floor by the crane above, the worm must stand, grasp the freed, 100-foot column of pipe, and force it over and against the other sections stacked against the side of the derrick. The first time I grabbed a column I was surprised by the violent, side-to-side bucking of its soaring height. The swinging momentum of the suspended steel tore it from me, and I grasped the bottom threads with my hands to gain control. Kenny almost knocked me out with a blow across the back of my head as I slid past him, carried by the shivering column of pipe across the mud-slick metal floor of the drilling platform. "Goddamned worm," he brayed at me through his toothless mouth, "Wanna lose your goddamned fingers?" He told me to bear-hug the pipe. Better to bruise your shoulder when you slam into metal and machinery than to sever your fingers. Comforting thought.

I should have been miserable about the work, but I was not. When men sweat and shiver together, they tend to enjoy an *esprit de corps*. The feeling was not unfamiliar. I had experienced it playing sports, and even more so in my fraternity of rock climbers. But what was new was the magnifying effect of machines. Dancing with dangerous and fierce iron that will both do their will and threaten their lives, men tend to form a bond that is more satisfying than the work is difficult, or maybe more satisfying because the work is difficult. And when the work takes them to remote, treeless plateaus to punch through the earth's skin to reach the precious blood of industrial society, they share in a secret, inner revelation of their place, their indispensable place, at the center of a sleeping world that with its calm and tree-lined suburban streets and well-timed commuter trains and smell of morning coffee turns around them in their high-spirited, splendid isolation.

No, I was not miserable, far from it. On my barstool in the Flamingo that November night, nearly three months after arriving in Rawlins, surrounded by the noise of an increasingly drunk and rowdy crowd, lost in my private reverie, I had visions of our common purpose, and I enjoyed warm feelings of solidarity with my working buddies. The music was bad and the barroom floor sticky with spilled beer. But I did not care. I was flushed with an exuberant inner embrace of everything that Rawlins had come to represent to me.

My mind was taking me back to the night shift of the day before. It had been a full day, but during a rare rest before the final push to complete a trip. I was sitting on the end of the drilling platform with Julio, the motorman, a compact, powerful, and laconic Mexican with five small children who lived on the far south end of Rawlins where the new state penitentiary was being built. To our

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side, one of the giant heaters blew hot air across the floor of the rig in a futile gesture against the rough wind of the high plains. We were bent over our flimsy paper coffee cups that we held with both hands to draw out all the warmth they could give. We looked outward over the vast expanse of south-central Wyoming now robed in noble purple of earliest dawn. In the distant semi-darkness a single set of headlights twinkled on U.S. Highway 287. Immediately behind us the engines of the rig purred at gentle idle. Julio turned his face down to his coffee, blew gently on it, and then turned to me. He said in layered tones of melancholic irony and genuine happiness, "Life is good, my friend."

Suddenly I was jerked into the unpleasant consciousness of a man who had thrust himself toward me at the bar. His face was as distorted by a lust for violence as his words were slurred by bourbon. "Who you lookin' at?" he asked.

It was not an innocent question. It never has been.

I was at a loss. In high school, some boys play an elaborate game of testing taunts. In the locker room after gym class, one or two self-appointed harpies kick your sneakers across the tile floor and then stand and smirk. Other boys down the bench look silently into their lockers. Or someone knocks your books out of your hands between classes, and then says a disingenuous "Sorry." Or a group of boys who think themselves at the top of the heap decide upon a demeaning nickname. "How is our little Gomer today?"

Cold indifference can parry these attempts to find out where you are in the male hierarchy, but not forever. Eventually a line is crossed, and you either submit to the humiliation, accept the dominance of those who insult, badger, and threaten, and just try to avoid them—or you enter into the ancient game of male combat that is the final arbiter of status. But my suburban high school had been pretty tame. Fighting in the hallways had been more a matter of pushing and grappling than the serious business of throwing punches with an eye toward blood.

"I said, who you lookin' at?"

"Nobody," I said. As soon as I had spoken, I realized that my answer had an entirely unintended ring of defiance. I had no idea of what I should do. The guy threatening me had no look of tentative, high-school posturing. He was missing a couple of teeth. He seemed completely uninterested in the verbal jousting that might have allowed me to try my hand at the art of graceful submission. And he was miles away from the genteel Dionysian drunkenness of kids with high SAT scores on apple-blossom spring evenings at Haverford College.

I saw the dirt mixed with sweat on his forehead. The flare in his nostrils sent a direct message to my gut. My brain seemed suddenly both entirely empty and completely engaged. I could hear my heart pounding and feel the veins in my neck thicken. He seemed to be saying something else, but my concentration on his face and his shoulders and his hands prevented me from thinking about his words. I felt the wave of my own fear crash over me and drown whatever semi-conscious democratic bonhomie I might have been feeling minutes before. I saw nothing but violence. I may have had oil-stained hands, but I was a well-scrubbed, orthodontically-correct college kid who wanted to call 911.

"Hey, you gotta problem with my buddy?" I didn't turn to look, but I saw the man in front of me shift his eyes. I felt Bruce's hand on my shoulder, gently pulling me back so that he could move forward. I was suddenly irrelevant, released from the gravity of the stranger's lust for battle. Bruce never looked at me. His fierce eyes were focused on the stranger whose menace had changed complexion. My fear drained away as suddenly as it had flooded my mind. Mr. Bourbon Breath was now where I had been.

BRUCE WAS a fellow roughneck, but he was not on my drilling crew. We had met at my house, where my roommate Bob kept a constant party going. He came the first time with his brother, whom I knew only as Spider, the nickname everybody used. They were the McGehee brothers. One of the other guys smoking pot with Bob leaned over to me and whispered as he nodded in Spider's direction, "He's banned from every bar in Rawlins. Beat up too many guys." As I looked over at Spider, who had settled into a dark silence in a chair off to the side, I flinched inwardly. He was big and lean, and he looked mean. I don't recall hearing him say a single word, and he never came around again.

Not so his brother Bruce, who smiled broadly and visited fairly often. I'm not sure why he befriended me. It amused and pleased him to make fun of my small pile of books in the room off the kitchen where I slept: Carl Jung, Herman Hesse, and other titles that would appeal to an increasingly late-adolescent seeker of my generation. Reading was not exactly a regular roughneck diversion.

But then again, Bruce was not exactly regular himself. He would come over to our house and sit

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on the couch, laughing and telling jokes. When others were talking, he would unconsciously twist his wrists, producing a loud cracking sound that I found difficult not to notice. So I asked him, "Bruce, what's with that noise?" He looked at me with a twinkle in his eye, "Well, Rusty, I was stupid enough to fall out of a helicopter upside down when I was in Vietnam, and I broke my damn wrists." "What were you doing in Vietnam?" I asked. He roared with laughter and exclaimed, "Fighting!"

There were other beer-drinking, fun-loving guys who made their way through our living room to buy psychotropic mushrooms from Bob. But Bruce's laughter blurred with passionate, serious moods. He recalled fishing with friends in his childhood in Arkansas, and his voice quivered with the joy of recollection. He had sized me up all too accurately, but with a generosity that came from not wanting to be anyone but who he was. Once he put his arm around me and spoke to me like an older brother, or maybe like a father—it was hard to place his natural combination of superiority and warmth. "Hey man," he said, "aren't you goin' back to college where you belong?" He wasn't trying to put me down. He wasn't even trying to encourage me to leave the rigs of Wyoming, which he regarded as a place every man would savor. He meant it as a way of telling me that he liked me for who I was, which did not require my being like him.

Bruce drank with the boys, but he never seemed to be drunk. He was intelligent and he enjoyed hard work. Unlike so many of the transient personalities that drifted in and out of rig work, he had a consistency that brought him to the level of a driller, a crew boss. In many ways, he was born for success. But he was born out of season. His spirited nature, what the ancient Greeks called *thumos*, predominated. He lived by a code of loyalty, personal dignity, and love of combat. Bourgeois values of prudent self-advancement, accumulation of wealth, and reliance on law and police to maintain social order were entirely alien to his personality. From the first I judged him a good man, but I never doubted that he was a dangerous man, a very dangerous man. I was glad that he was friendly toward me, not just because he had a generous heart, but because I could see that it might be perilous to be someone Bruce did not like.

That November night in the Flamingo, with my wallet full of cash and my gently intoxicated mind full of roughneck reveries of my grand fusion with the American experience, it was my great good fortune that Bruce was not at all a man of my upper-middle-class world. He stared at the stranger. He did not try to mediate. He did not try to defuse the situation. "If you want to get to him," Bruce said, gesturing in my direction, "you gotta go through me."

The other man was silent. I thought that I could actually smell the faint but pungent and humiliating odor of his fear. Bruce was not just a linebacker of a man; he had the capacity to give his will an almost physical, visible expression in the intensity of his posture and the cold force of his voice. His eyes were filled with violence, but unlike the drunken man and his wild, uncontrolled desire for blood, Bruce's face conveyed a joyful, seemingly rational anticipation of battle.

The band was still playing in the back room. A part of my senses heard the noise of voices and the bar glasses that continued to tinkle in the sink as they were being washed. But it seemed as though the world had gone silent. The stars themselves pivoted around the gravitational force of Bruce's presence. Everybody at the bar turned. I still see their faces in the barroom of my memory. They are looking at Bruce with an awe that admires and recoils from a superior being, a god, who would both fulfill their own ideals and destroy them in their weakness.

The stranger's lips pulled back across his broken rows of teeth in a look of primitive horror. Bruce's fierce expression gave way to a wry smile that suggested he had known many such men and their vague, formless lust for violence, their inflated, whiskey-fueled courage. The stranger seemed more to disappear and vaporize than to turn and walk away.

"Thanks for helping me out," I said. Bruce's smile became broad, and then he laughed. "Stay out of trouble, my friend." He unconsciously cracked his wrists, and then turned to the bartender and said in a ringing voice, "Give this man a beer." He threw down some money, patted me on the back, and disappeared into the crowd from which he had so miraculously emerged. It was only a couple of days later that I told my boss I was quitting to go back to college.

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MUSIC

Free the Piano Player

Terry Teachout

IT IS now widely acknowledged that classical music in America is in dire, even desperate straits. Critics, commentators, and managers have noted with alarm that concert audiences are aging steadily and that people under fifty seem disinclined either to attend classical-music events or to support the organizations that present them. Some presenters and performers have responded by seeking to change the time-honored institution of the solo recital in ways meant to make it less formal and more contemporary. Classical artists, for example, are now being advised to speak to their audiences from the stage, to play a fresher and wider-ranging mix of repertoire, even to employ up-to-date staging techniques.

Yet as anyone who keeps up with the programs in America's major concert halls is well aware, very few artists are taking this advice. Far more often than not, classical performers continue to come before the public dressed in more or less formal attire and to play two-hour-long programs consisting of three or four groups of pieces drawn from the standard repertoire and arranged in chronological order, never speaking a word out loud save to announce their encores.

Nor is this reluctance to break with tradition a function of age. The thirty-eight-year-old Norwegian pianist Leif Ove Andsnes, one of the most highly acclaimed classical performers of his generation, played a recital last month at Carnegie Hall that could have been given in 1968, or 1928: a Bach toccata, a Schubert sonata, Grieg's G Minor Ballade, and a group of Debussy preludes.

What few of today's concertgoers know is that there was once a time when classical recitals were very different—less straitlaced, more improvisational, and, above all, more populist in tone. But just as the playing styles of classical performers changed with the coming of modernism, so did the way in which performers learned to present themselves to the public. These changes are the subject of an important new book by Kenneth Hamilton called *After the Golden Age: Romantic Pianism and Modern Performance*.[1]

After the Golden Age is based on extensive research into the performance practices of the pianists of the 19th and early 20th centuries, a period known to record collectors as the "golden age" of classical pianism. Hamilton, a concert pianist and teacher at the University of Birmingham in the UK, offers the fruits of his labors in the hope that they will inspire performers to break with "the fusty rituals of modern concert-giving, in which the music is served up with the superciliousness of a sneering sommelier offering over-priced wine at a too-long-established restaurant." His style is dryly witty, his scholarship immaculate—and his conclusions challenging.

AT THE turn of the 20th century, a handful of classical instrumentalists began to make commercial recordings of their playing, and within a decade or two the practice had become commonplace among well-known performers. Several famous pianists born in the mid-19th cen-

TERRY TEACHOUT, COMMENTARY's *regular music critic and the drama critic of the* Wall Street Journal, *is finishing a biography of Louis Armstrong. He blogs about the arts at www.terryteachout.com.*

[1] Oxford, 304 pp., $29.95.

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tury, including Josef Hofmann, Vladimir de Pachmann, Ignace Jan Paderewski, and Moriz Rosenthal, recorded fairly extensively, and many others, like Ferruccio Busoni, cut just enough 78's to give us a reasonably clear idea of what their playing sounded like.

Taken together, these recordings leave no possible doubt that golden-age pianism bore little resemblance to most of the playing heard in concert halls today. The main differences, all of which are discussed in detail by Hamilton, are these:

• Golden-age pianists generally treated the written score as a guide to interpretation rather than a definitive set of instructions. Many of them added unwritten embellishments of various kinds to the pieces they played. Vladimir Horowitz, the last major classical pianist to play with such textual freedom, recorded versions of works like Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody No. 15 that deviated so dramatically from the score as to amount to substantially original compositions.[2]

• Even when these pianists stuck to the notes on the page, they played them with a rhythmic elasticity that is unknown today. Not only did they employ a wide and unusually flexible rubato, but many of them also indulged in what Hamilton calls "asynchronous" playing, in which the individual notes in a melodic phrase are struck slightly before or after the bass notes accompanying them. The purpose of this custom (which was popularly known as "breaking hands") was to make the melody stand out in higher relief and give it a "singing" quality, in much the same way that a soprano might sing the melody of an aria in a freely improvisatory manner while the orchestra in the pit accompanies her with rhythmic strictness.

• Golden-age pianists put a higher premium on bravura and spontaneity than on precise execution, and as a result many of them played far more wrong notes than would now be considered acceptable by critics and audiences. Nineteenth-century listeners had other priorities. When the British composer Charles Villiers Stanford heard Johannes Brahms play his Second Piano Concerto, he observed that the composer "took it for granted that the public knew he had written the right notes, and did not worry himself over such little trifles as hitting the wrong ones. . . . [T]hey did not disturb his hearers any more than himself."

Not only did 19th-century pianists play differently from their present-day counterparts, but the style of their public performances differed as well, and in equally significant ways.

The solo recital, as Hamilton reminds us, was invented by Franz Liszt in 1839. Prior to that time, pianists and other instrumentalists appeared in "variety" concerts that included other artists. Even after Liszt was (in his words) "boundlessly impudent" enough to begin playing programs that featured him exclusively, the variety concert continued to hold sway. Only toward the end of the 19th century did it become normal for pianists to perform alone rather than with assisting artists.

No less distinct from today's standard was the recital repertoire of Liszt's day. In a letter to a friend, Liszt described the program of one of his first solo recitals:

> 1. Overture to [Rossini's] *William Tell*, performed by M.L. [i.e., "Monsieur Liszt"]
>
> 2. *Reminiscences des Puritains* [i.e., Bellini's opera *I Puritani*]. Fantasy composed and performed by the above-mentioned!
>
> 3. Etudes and fragments, by the same to the same!
>
> 4. Improvisations on given themes—still by the same.

Nor was there anything unusual about this program. In the 19th century, virtually all concert pianists doubled as composers and regularly programmed their own works, be they good, bad, or indifferent in quality. It was customary for them to offer "reminiscences" and "paraphrases" based on themes from the popular operas of the day, and customary as well to improvise in public, sometimes on themes submitted by members of the audience. Liszt actually encouraged his listeners to deposit written suggestions in an urn located in the lobby of the concert hall, whose contents he would then peruse on stage before choosing one or more on which to hold forth.[3]

It was not until the mid-19th century that concert pianists began to replace improvisations and operatic paraphrases with large-scale works by composers other than themselves, and they often performed individual movements rather than complete works. By the 1880's, pianists like Busoni, Anton Rubinstein, and Hans von Bülow were offering "historical" programs broadly similar to (though usually much longer than) the chronological programs that are now the concert-hall norm. Even then, though, most pianists packed the second halves of their programs with lighter pieces that nowadays would be more likely to be offered as encores—if at all.

In order to perform so large and varied a repertoire, 19th-century pianists frequently played not from

[2] Horowitz's 1950 recording of the Fifteenth Rhapsody, also known as the *Rákóczy March*, is available on *Horowitz Encores* (RCA Victor Gold Seal 7755-2-RG). The recording, like the others mentioned below, can be purchased online by viewing this article on Commentary's website, www.commentarymagazine.com, and it can also be downloaded directly from iTunes. (Other recordings available from iTunes are marked with an asterisk.)

[3] At an 1838 concert in Milan, one member of the audience submitted not a musical theme but a written question: "Is it better to marry or remain single?" Instead of attempting to improvise on this "theme" at the piano, the quick-witted Liszt responded by telling his delighted listeners, "Whichever course one chooses, one is sure to regret it."

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memory but from the printed page, a practice that is now thought to be amateurish. They also "introduced" the various pieces on their programs by playing brief preludes, sometimes composed by themselves or others (Chopin's 24 piano preludes may have been intended for this purpose) but more often improvised on the spot. In addition to using modulatory chordal sequences to bridge the tonal gap between pieces composed in tonally distant keys, 19th-century pianists "preluded" in order to quiet noisy audiences and ease them into a receptive mood. While these transitional passages were rarely included on studio recordings, Josef Hofmann can be heard preluding on many of the live recordings he made in the 30's.[4]

As for the members of 19th-century audiences, they thought nothing of applauding not merely between movements, but in order to pay tribute to a particularly well-played passage in the middle of a piece. By the same token, Liszt frequently greeted his listeners in the lobby and chatted with them between pieces. "A concert then," says Hamilton, "was indeed far more like a modern jazz or pop gig than the sometimes quite astonishingly frigid trotting-out of the standard repertoire we call a recital."

TO LISTEN to recordings made by pianists born in the 19th century is to be struck by their extreme individuality, bordering at times on outright eccentricity. It is a powerful musical flavor—one that some present-day listeners, perhaps not surprisingly, find overpowering. As I have written of Vladimir de Pachmann:

> The elaborate idiosyncrasies of his playing will no doubt mystify [modern] listeners . . . in much the same way that they might be puzzled by the rhetorical excesses of a performance by Edwin Booth or Sarah Bernhardt of a play by Shakespeare or Racine. Such excesses, however, were taken for granted in the 19th century; indeed, they were in a very real sense what romanticism was all about.[5]

Such excesses are rarely encountered in 21st-century concert halls, where audiences sit in (relative) silence and listen to programs consisting mainly of performances of the classics that, in comparison with the recordings of a Pachmann or a Moriz Rosenthal, are straightforward to the point of sober-sidedness. But to what end? Hamilton, for one, claims to have written *After the Golden Age* out of

> a deep unease with the sheer routine and funereal boredom of some piano recitals I have attended. . . . Whatever disadvantages early-romantic concerts had, they were often more informal and sound simply like a lot more fun, for both performers and audiences.

It is easy to sympathize with this statement, which flies in the face of the critical orthodoxy that has prevailed throughout the past half-century. Here, for instance, is the critic Michael Steinberg taking issue with Vladimir Horowitz:

> He conceives of interpretation not as the reification of the composer's ideas, but as an essentially independent activity. . . . Horowitz illustrates that an astounding instrumental gift carries no guarantee of musical understanding.

Significantly, Steinberg's remark was made not in a newspaper review but in the article about Horowitz that he contributed to the 1980 edition of *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*.

One need not regard Horowitz as a paragon of interpretative virtue to see Hamilton's point and to feel dissatisfaction with the not-infrequent blandness of the "international style" (as I have called it) that came to dominate classical performance after World War II. Indeed, in partial and welcome rebellion against the still-prevailing norm, a number of younger pianists, including Marc-André Hamelin and Stephen Hough, now perform a repertoire ranging from 19th-century encore pieces to 21st-century concertos in a manner informed both by golden-age performance practice and by the international style.

Might we also profit by casting a colder eye on the social formality that continues to shape the experience of concertgoing? Again, Hamilton thinks so. "A little less reverence and a bit more entertainment would do us no harm today," he writes.

I agree again—up to a point. I would not want to live in a musical world denuded of the high seriousness that allowed a pianist like Artur Schnabel to devote the last part of his life to playing nothing but Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert; nor would I care to see the time-honored institution of the classical concert turned into (say) the highbrow counterpart of reality TV. At the same time, though, I would not want to live in a musical world that consisted only of Schnabels. It is possible to admire Schnabel *and* Horowitz, Dinu Lipatti *and* Rosenthal, Murray Perahia *and* Glenn Gould. Those who think otherwise are at risk of falling victim to the soul-numbing priggishness that drains the life out of art.

---

[4] Though now extinct, the practice of preluding lasted well beyond Hofmann's time. Dinu Lipatti, who was born in 1917, can be heard playing a brief modulatory prelude linking the end of the Bach B-flat Partita to the beginning of the Mozart A Minor Sonata on a live recording of a recital that he gave at the Besançon Festival shortly before his death in 1950 (EMI Classics 562 819-2).*

[5] "Romancing the Score" (COMMENTARY, July-August 2003). In fact, Bernhardt made four commercial recordings in 1910, one of which is an excerpt from Racine's *Phèdre*. They can be heard at www.cylinders.library.ucsb.edu.

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Golden-Age Pianism: A Sampler

• Vladimir de Pachmann (1848-1933) recorded throughout the second half of his long career. *Pachmann: The Mythic Pianist* includes a 1923 version of Chopin's popular "Raindrop" Prelude in which the right-hand melody and left-hand accompaniment are extensively desynchronized (Arbiter 129).*

• Ignace Jan Paderewski (1860-1941), after Liszt the most popular pianist of the golden age, recorded Beethoven's "Moonlight" Sonata in 1937, toward the end of his life. The first movement, an aural *vade mecum* of the "broken-hands" style of the 19th century, is included in a Paderewski anthology that also contains shorter pieces by Chopin, Liszt, and Schumann (ASV Living Era 8555).

• Of all the many pupils of Franz Liszt, Moriz Rosenthal (1862-1946) recorded most frequently and representatively. His playing can be heard on *Moriz Rosenthal, Vol. 2*, which includes a capricious, rhythmically free 1929 performance of Liszt's piano transcription of Chopin's song "The Maiden's Wish," so heavily embellished and otherwise altered as to constitute an essentially new arrangement of the original song (Pearl GEMM CD 9963).

• Ferruccio Busoni (1866-1924) disliked the process of recording and left behind issued takes of only nine pieces, all done in 1922 and now available as part of *Busoni and His Legacy*. His versions of Chopin's A Major Prelude and "Black Key" Etude offer a uniquely vivid glimpse of turn-of-the-century performance practice: Busoni plays the prelude twice, then modulates into G-flat for a textually free interpretation of the etude (Arbiter 134).

• Josef Hofmann (1876-1957) was the only great pianist of his time to leave behind a large number of live recordings, including a 1937 recital now available on CD as *The Complete Josef Hofmann, Vol. 2: The Golden Jubilee Concert*. Hofmann's now-restrained, now-explosive playing can be heard to especially fine effect in the performance of Chopin's G Minor Ballade that he gave as part of this recital. Like most of the other pieces on the program, it is prefaced by Hofmann's own improvised "preluding" (VAI Audio VAIA/IPA 1020, two CD's).*

• Alfred Cortot (1877-1962) made many memorable Liszt recordings, including a 1926 performance of the *"Rigoletto" Concert Paraphrase* that is legendary for its headlong abandon—as well as for the fistfuls of wrong notes that Cortot tosses off with the utmost panache (Pearl GEMM CD 9396).

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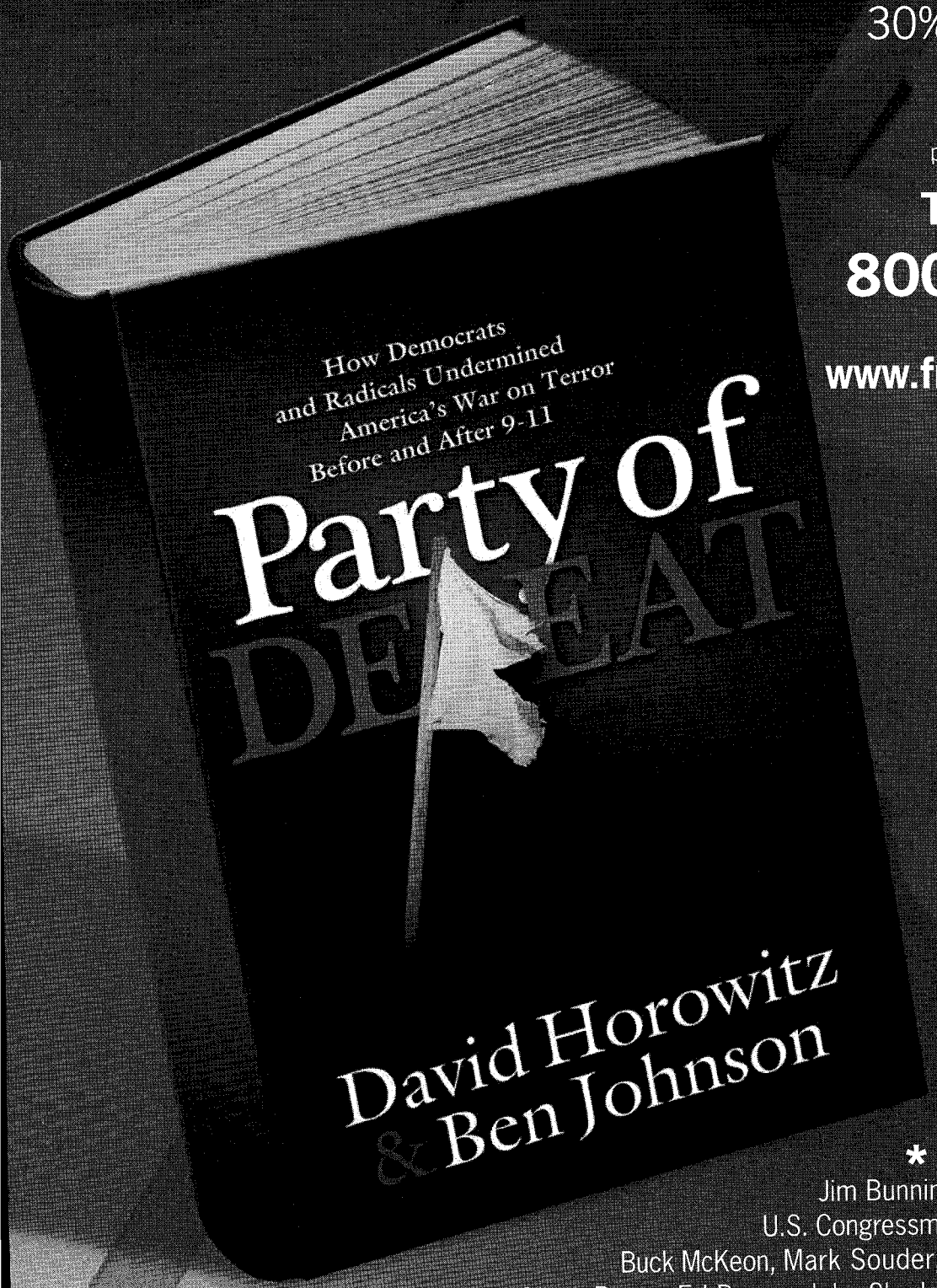

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Books in Review

Out of Sorts

Alfred Kazin: A Biography
by Richard M. Cook
Yale. 464 pp. $35.00

Reviewed by
Carol Iannone

In the late 1930's and early 40's, a young literary critic and recent graduate of the City College of New York spent four years composing a 500-page survey of American writers from 1880 to 1940. Working in the magnificent reading room of the New York Public Library, Alfred Kazin (1915-1998) traced the course of what he saw as a realist and progressive tradition in American letters. He did so, moreover, as one personally imbued with the socialist hopefulness that he had absorbed from the immigrant Jewish milieu in which he grew up and that now seemed widespread and flourishing.

The book, *On Native Grounds: An Interpretation of Modern American Prose Literature* (1942), was wildly successful, and launched its young author on a spectacular literary career. Although much of it might seem dated and overly precious to a reader today, *On Native Grounds* showed an amazingly confident and precocious grasp of its subject, and was rightly heralded as a landmark effort at claiming high status for modern American writing among the world's great literatures. It also helped pave the way for the academic interest in American studies that would burgeon after the war and in which Kazin himself would play a part as an influential teacher, public lecturer, and the author of innumerable essays and reviews.

Richard M. Cook's new biography, for which he enjoyed access to Kazin himself as well as to his family, friends, and ex-friends, carefully and serviceably narrates the enormous whirl of activity in Kazin's life. Cook is honest, thorough, even-handed, and conscientious, if also excessively gentle in dissecting his subject's emotional shortcomings and self-indulgent intellectual meanderings. Perhaps more disappointingly, he never quite penetrates to the core of a man who was often divided against himself and who never fully recovered from the collapse of the radical "hope" that he once described as his only religion, and who ever afterward sought in literature the personal fulfillment and transcendence that literature ever afterward denied him.

In a new preface to *On Native Grounds* on its 50th anniversary, Kazin would write that in composing the book "I felt what I have never felt since 1945—that the age was wholly with me." Although he would continue to write reams of criticism, never again could he believe, as he did then, in the vital, primal connections between literature and history, or be confident in the power of literature itself to provide the impulse for progressive change.

Indeed, his most memorable books after *On Native Grounds* were not about literature at all but about himself. In *Walker in the City* (1951) he returned to his boyhood in Brownsville, Brooklyn, where he had been born to Russian Jewish immigrants, a formidably energetic mother and a sad, silent father from whom the young Kazin inherited

Carol Iannone *is editor-at-large of* Academic Questions. *Her review of Philip Roth's* Exit Ghost *appeared in our November 2007 issue.*

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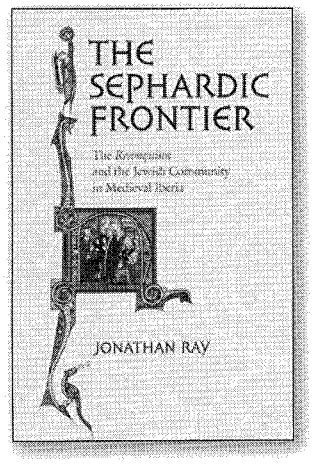

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his good looks and socialist sympathies. This was followed by *Starting Out in the Thirties* (1965), a vivid re-creation of the excitement of the radical decade that formed him and propelled his career. Kazin's trilogy of memoirs would conclude with the far less captivating *New York Jew* (1978), which recorded his life at the pinnacle of success but which reads, as one critic put it, like a "lamentation."

When he did return to literature, as in *Contemporaries* (1962), *Bright Book of Life* (1973), and *An American Procession* (1984), it was often by piecing together many previously published reviews and articles, with no particular rethinking or fresh insight, no overarching framework or thesis. These volumes, when they were not politely ignored, emerged to a mostly lukewarm critical reception, a response with which Kazin himself was sometimes forced to agree. As he wrote at one point in his journal:

> My tendency as a writer and critic [is] to dwell on the "high points" of a text, the emotional peaks, the "isolated beauties" instead of the *argument* of a book. My weakness as a literary scholar and as a writer is to opt for the creative moment.

Such proclivities, as Cook notes, were less suited to full-length studies than to short essays, reviews, and introductions, like the one Kazin provided for *The Portable Blake* (1976), or for compilations like *A Lifetime Burning in Every Moment* (1996), a book based on his journals. (In addition to everything else, he was a prodigious diarist who minutely chronicled his own thoughts and feelings as well as his often caustic observations of others.) Here as elsewhere, although Kazin's writing can often be evocative and even insightful, no less often it is airy, vague, impressionistic, and, it must be said, quite forgettable, running along fluidly but resisting any anchorage in solid argument.

SOMETHING OF the same might be said as well of his general disposition toward life. It was what allowed him to travel two tracks at once, to be personally part of things and yet apart from them. Eager as a young man to move out of Brownsville, he also wanted never to leave it. He longed for the glamorous Manhattan world "beyond," but once having arrived in the literary salons of Gotham he found himself "bitter, bitter" at the contrast with his own threadbare background and at real or imagined slights directed at him for being "too Jewish." He wanted both the emotional stability of marriage and the sexual adventure of repeated adulteries. (In all he had four marriages and two children.) During the cold war, he was both anti-Communist and anti-anti Communist, condemning both the Soviet Union and America's firm stance toward it.

He was anti-Zionist as well, and in 1948 opposed Israeli statehood, yet was moved to tears when reading of its founding. Visiting the Jewish state, he disdained its bourgeois "normality" and what he saw as its increasing militancy, though after the 1967 war he acknowledged the disaster that would have ensued had the Arabs won. Most of his life he floated Chagall-like between Jewish and Christian ideas of revelation, while never committing himself to any form of religious worship. Of the Jews he said at one point that they had been chosen in history to "keep alive the memory of the divine source from which our lives come," yet when he had the opportunity to make his own contribution to the nexus of literary history and religion, all he could produce was the tepid *God and the American Writer* (1997).

WITH THE rise of the New Left in the 1960's, in which his estranged son Michael played a part, Kazin sniffed the return of radical politics. As was his custom, he flittered in response, managing to deplore the ex-

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cesses of the young while sympathizing with their professed aims and joining his voice to their indictment of America's inequities. As Cook respectfully records his thoughts, Kazin did not "believe in civil disobedience" but was also capable of writing that "the Vietnam war is so sickening that anything is justified against it." On the other hand, he equivocated, when "anyone can take the law into his own hands, where is the law for the rest of us?" On the third hand, too much hesitation prevented needed action. And so forth.

As for the know-nothing counterculture of the 1960's and its assault on "bourgeois" literary and academic standards, Kazin knew that this threatened all that he held dear. Still, he could not condemn it. Instead, he began to question the reactionary nature of literature itself, with its "tragic view of the world." Why, he pondered (in Cook's paraphrase), should

> the "complexities" of literature necessarily have the last word over political thought and action? And did not literature, even great literature, sanction action on occasion, even revolutionary action? . . . [W]hat did the ever-thoughtful, sober, patient counselors of the young have to offer—except more patience?

When a group of Kazin's fellow New York intellectuals could no longer equivocate about the destructive nature of the New Left and the counterculture, instead finally and boldly breaking with contemporary Left-liberalism, Kazin was incensed, seeing in the rise of neoconservatism a final betrayal of the socialist ideals they had all grown up with and of the Jews of old Brownsville.

Kazin would come to lament the wreckage inflicted by campus radicalism on the life of the mind in America. (Cook at one point remarks on the exceptional sophistication of the discussions in which Kazin participated on commercial radio during the 1950's.) It caught up with him most definitively, perhaps, when he taught at Brown in 1994. He could hardly believe how poorly prepared were his top students, how loose and empty the curriculum that was supposed to educate them. He vowed never to teach again—though, typically, he still could not bring himself to make the connection between the destruction of the high culture that had been his life's blood and the radicalism of the young ("morally the most stimulating, restless, generous, and disinterested social group in the country") and their tenured cheerleaders.

The image of Alfred Kazin with his melancholy demeanor, his briefcase of books, his heart full of the writers he loved, and his pen ever

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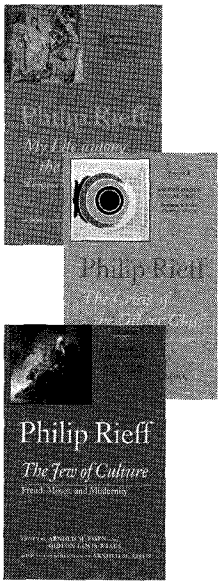

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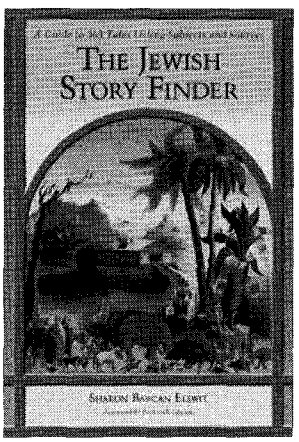

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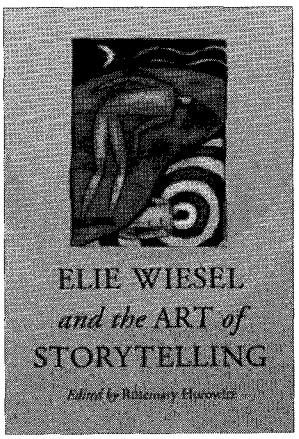

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ready to record moments of literary illumination cannot but recall, however inadequately, the luster that was America's mid-century moment of cultural seriousness. All the greater pity that, when the need to defend and protect that culture was at its most critical, Alfred Kazin was to be found wavering in absentia, his gaze somehow still fixed on those days in the library, when he believed the age was with him.

Freedom Agenda

Democracy Without Borders?: Global Challenges to Liberal Democracy

by Marc F. Plattner

Rowman & Littlefield. 176 pp. $24.95.

The Spirit of Democracy: The Struggle to Build Free Societies Throughout the World

by Larry Diamond

Times Books. 464 pp. $28.00.

Reviewed by
Ted R. Bromund

THESE ARE difficult days for those who believe that the promotion of democracy should be a key element of American foreign policy. From Russia to Thailand to Ukraine to Kenya, elections have been cancelled or marred by violence, democratic governments have fallen into paralysis, and autocratic regimes have risen to power.

The situation in the Middle East, which in 2003 seemed ripe for a wave of democratic change, is now thought to be particularly discouraging. The promise of the 2005 Cedar Revolution in Lebanon has dissipated amid continued Syrian meddling and Lebanese factionalism. Hamas's victory in the 2006 Palestinian legislative election has lent force to the argument that promoting democracy in the region—the focal point of the Bush Doctrine—would lead not to the replacement of oppressive regimes by representative governments but to the triumph of Islamic radicalism.

If democracy promotion is mentioned at all these days, it is usually to provide another reason for dismissing the supposedly half-baked ideology of the Bush administration. The conventional wisdom of the moment is that you cannot force people to be free. Stability is back in fashion: what we are supposed to do with our enemies is not to seek their overthrow but to invite them to join us at the bargaining table.

MARC F. PLATTNER and Larry Diamond will have none of this. Co-editors since 1991 of the *Journal of Democracy*, published by the National Endowment for Democracy, they are justly regarded as two of the founding fathers of the democracy-promotion movement. While hardly turning a blind eye to today's difficulties—far from it—each has written a book that passionately rejects the new, defeatist attitude toward encouraging the advance of freedom around the world.

Despite the authors' long mutual association, the two works are markedly dissimilar in approach. Plattner's compact volume assembles two decades' worth of essays into a cohesive and well-written, if somewhat abstract, investigation of the obstacles facing democracy promotion today and the conditions under which democracy can survive and thrive. Diamond's book is more immediately practical, as befits an opponent of the Iraq war who in 2003 spent three months in Baghdad working on democratization issues before coming home to write

TED R. BROMUND, *a new contributor, is associate director of international security studies at Yale University, where he is a lecturer in history and international relations.*

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Squandered Victory, a stinging account of his experience; he presents here what one might call the sobered, post-Iraq Democratic vision of democracy promotion.

For Plattner, today's challenge to democracy promotion comes in two forms, each of which has its intellectual origins within the established democracies of the West. First, there is the argument, made most notably by Fareed Zakaria in a 1997 *Foreign Affairs* article, "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy," that rule by the majority, rather than forming a gateway to liberalism, can itself be illiberal, and is not necessarily preferable to rule by enlightened authoritarians. In Zakaria's view, it is better for the U.S. to support moderate autocrats than to press for popular rule in societies that have not yet developed the necessary sustaining institutions (a free press, rule of law, and the like). As his model, he points to the 19th-century monarchies of Europe that in the fullness of time evolved into genuinely representative democracies.

Plattner's reply to this is convincing. Liberal autocracy, he says, is a contradiction in terms, and especially so today. Thanks to the advance of liberal ideas and to the expanded definition of what liberalism encompasses, Zakaria's favored European monarchies would no longer qualify as either liberal or legitimate. Nor, in today's circumstances, could such regimes hope to achieve sustainable economic growth or political stability. In the 21st century, liberal authoritarianism is not a workable solution, even in the near term.

The second and, for Plattner, more threatening challenge to democracy comes from a different source—namely, the diminishing value placed by Western elites on the nation-state. Within the democracies of the West, post-modern entities like the European Union, and supranational organizations based on globalist assumptions like the International Criminal Court, are increasingly encroaching on, or supplanting, national institutions. These new organizations, Plattner argues, are waging a transnational assault on the sovereignty of the people in ways that John Locke—the guiding spirit of *Democracy Without Borders?*—would have found alarming.

The upshot for Plattner is that while liberalism may indeed be weak in the world's new democracies, the greater problem lies in the world's established democracies, where the democratic spirit of self-government itself is fading. How, then, are we to summon the will to campaign on behalf of this spirit elsewhere?

Larry Diamond starts from a seemingly more hopeful position than Marc Plattner's. The central claim in *The Spirit of Democracy* is that democracy is indeed becoming a universal value—one that belongs not to the rich, or to the West, but to everyone.

As Diamond sees it, three factors are driving this democratic revolution. First, there are the internal causes—by which he means the growth of civil society and of the middle class in developing states. Second are the external forces, including not only the impact of democratic change in nations geographically close to unfree states but also the pressure that stable democracies can exert on autocracies to move in the right direction. And, finally, there are the regional influences, of which, to Diamond, the European Union is the outstanding example.

Unlike Plattner, Diamond sees no incompatibility between the central democratic precept of self-rule and the rise of supranational institutions that are only minimally responsive to the voice of the people. Yet his meliorist view has a dark side, which emerges when he considers the factors that he believes are inhibiting democracy's spread.

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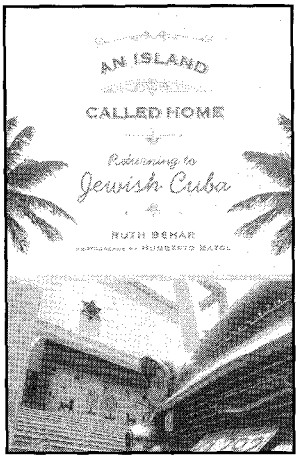

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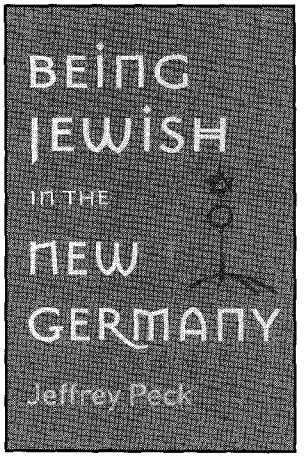

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In Diamond's reckoning, these obstacles are largely procedural, taking the form of corruption, favoritism, and the abuse of power: phenomena all too common in the world's weaker democracies. By making it more difficult for governments to deliver the goods—i.e., to improve the lives of ordinary people—such deformities threaten to discredit democracy itself in the eyes of newly enfranchised citizens.

In short, where Plattner worries about the future of democracy promotion in terms of such bedrock philosophical principles as justice, equality, and self-government, Diamond fears for the practical and material problems. (It is a curiosity of Diamond's book that despite his emphasis on the centrality of the democratic spirit, he espouses a materialist vision of democracy's virtues.) And yet, despite their differences of approach and temperament, the two do share a sense that their cause, if not in full retreat, is on the defensive and needs to be rescued. Neither expects to bring many autocracies into the democratic community in the next decade. The requirement now, both argue, is to consolidate the gains that have been made by working to deepen democracy where it already exists.

IT IS interesting and telling in this connection that both Diamond and Plattner name Pervez Musharraf's 1999 coup in Pakistan as the moment when the democratization wave began to ebb. Before that event, democracy was snowballing, building on local economic growth, on international support, and on its own momentum. After it, authoritarians, buoyed by the rising price of oil, began to cooperate and to fight back against democratic movements that in many cases were based, as in Pakistan, on profoundly fractured societies.

If Plattner and Diamond are right about this, then the burst of hopeful events in the Middle East in the aftermath of our 2003 invasion of Iraq represented but a brief respite in a spiral already headed downward. But are they right?

It is certainly true that the cause of democracy promotion seemed far simpler and uncomplicated back in the 1990's, after the collapse of the Soviet empire had eliminated its leading ideological antagonist. In those days it seemed logical that the new middle classes around the world, born of economic globalization, would follow the path laid out by their forebears in 19th-century Europe. A rising bourgeoisie would demand political rights commensurate with its economic power, and the remaining autocracies would be consigned to the dustbin of history.

For many, the best part of this process was that it seemed nearly automatic. Here and there, the West might have to give it a push by supporting a trade union or providing a fax machine, but there was no need for the United States to use force, and no danger of risky interventions. The world was flattening our way.

This benign optimism was never fully tested—instead, it was destroyed, less by the 1999 coup in Pakistan than by the first plane that hit the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. Yet 9/11 also imparted fresh urgency to the campaign for democracy promotion. In the vision of the Bush administration and its supporters, what the Middle East, and the world, needed in order to eradicate mass terrorism at its source was, in fact, the birth and nurturance of democratic freedom. Democracy offered a brighter, more prosperous, freer future; without it, there would be war without end in a world with proliferating weapons of mass destruction.

In 2003, this argument had great purchase. Only when the U.S. fal-

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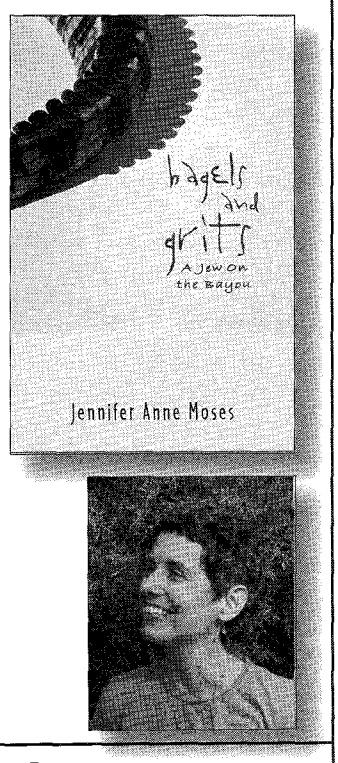

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tered in Iraq and the region's autocrats saw their chance to reverse the gains made by local reformist forces did faith in democracy promotion falter as well.

Nevertheless, and especially in light of the reversals in Iraq itself, many of them now in the process of being reversed in their turn, today's pessimism strikes me as no less excessive than the optimism of the mid-to-late 1990's. Plattner and Diamond are wholly justified in underlining the crucial importance of Pakistan—less, however, because of the 1999 coup than because the kind of indigenous social and religious fissures that divide that country are the most serious threat to democracy in states around the world. Still, the recent elections in both Pakistan and Iraq—the two cases that have done the most to dishearten both authors—show that while the turmoil in these countries is all too real, so too is the willingness among tens of millions to vote for a better future and to protest the denial of freedom.

In a world where the idea of democracy has been let loose, the most fatal step the United States could take now would be to decide to back the dictators against the people. That choice is always on the menu, and it is a tempting one. But there is no easy escape back into a false realism. However great the current challenge to the cause to which Plattner and Diamond have devoted their careers, the need for resolute American leadership on the democratization front remains as urgent as ever. This is something that both authors agree on, and about which they are unquestionably right.

Death of the Humanities?

Education's End: Why Our Colleges and Universities Have Given Up on the Meaning of Life

by Anthony T. Kronman

Yale. 320 pp. $27.50

Reviewed by
Ben Wildavsky

Anthony Kronman tells two compelling stories in this new book on the demise of the humanities. The first is brief and autobiographical. In the mid-1960's, he dropped out of Williams College, eager to give his life meaning by taking an active part in the great social changes of his time. He spent seven months in Chicago, ringing doorbells and attending meetings as a community organizer for Students for a Democratic Society. But the sense of purpose he was seeking eluded him, and before long he was back at Williams. There, enrolling in a seminar on existentialism, he was soon eagerly anticipating intense weekly discussions of Kierkegaard, Sartre, and the Catholic philosopher Gabriel Marcel. Not only was the course's central question—how best to live—a weighty one, but, he writes, he learned something unexpected and life-changing: "the meaning of life is a subject that can be studied in school."

This conviction, in turn, led Kronman to his life's work as an academic. Armed with a law degree and a Ph.D. in philosophy, he has spent most of his career as a professor and dean at Yale Law School, and in recent years has taught in the university's elite freshman humanities program. It also led him to write this extended manifesto. For, after decades in the university, Kronman is saddened and alarmed that a subject that should by rights be at the center of an undergraduate education—"the exploration of life's mystery and meaning through the careful but critical reading of the great works of literary and philosophical imagination"—has instead been relegated to "the margins of professional respectability." Hence his second, more detailed story: an earnest, densely reasoned account of just how this happened, and how it might be fixed.

In the earliest days of American higher education, which Kronman terms "the age of piety," the Puritans who founded Harvard College in 1636 took for granted that shaping students' souls was central to a college's purpose. Two centuries later, a multitude of institutions had been established, which, despite their differing characteristics, typically had in common a fixed curriculum studied by all students and taught by polymath non-specialists. At Yale, whose curriculum was particularly influential, freshmen began their studies with readings including Livy, Horace, Homer, and Euclid's *Elements* before moving on to Cicero, Xenophon, Plato, Thucydides, and so on.

But the study of the humanities at American colleges only reached its golden age, Kronman contends, in the period after the Civil War. A confluence of factors—increased skepticism about religion, new scientific advances, and the decisive influence of the research-oriented German academic model—transformed U.S. higher education. For the next century or so, even as our universities embraced research, and some also began to teach vocational subjects ranging from business management to cotton farming, the humanities were left with the "special responsibility" of teaching students what life is for.

Under this dispensation, they thrived. During the ensuing "age of secular humanism," as Kronman ap-

Ben Wildavsky *is a senior fellow in research and policy at the Kauffman Foundation and a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution.*

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provingly calls it, the classical and religiously "conformist" curriculum of the antebellum college was expanded and made more pluralistic, now including modern works of European philosophy and literature, from Dante and Descartes to Kant and Hegel. Equipped with this shared vocabulary, students could grapple with ancient notions of virtue and order as well as with modern ideas of individuality. They could thus become participants, Kronman writes, in what the British philosopher Michael Oakeshott "memorably called a 'great conversation.'" Each student was taught to see himself "as a respectful but not subservient latecomer to this conversation, who ha[d] much to learn but also something to add."

BUT THE century or so in which the "secular humanist" approach was widespread in American colleges was not to last. Ever since the late 1960's, Kronman laments, "the question of life's meaning has ceased to be a recognized and valued subject of instruction even in the humanities."

Kronman's twin culprits are the politicization of American campuses and the rise of the powerful research ideal that has come to dominate American universities. In the case of the former, Kronman enumerates the assorted ways in which contemporary academic attitudes—a suspicion of Western values, an embrace of diversity and multiculturalism, and a hospitality to the theory that "values are merely disguised acts of power"—have created a hopelessly hostile environment for the humanities.

Secular humanism, Kronman declares, allowed for true intellectual diversity. "It had room for Plato's elitism and Augustine's pessimism as well as for more democratic and cheerier views of life." By contrast, today's race-, class-, and gender-driven notion of diversity, even as it claims to be exposing students to previously excluded voices, is in fact remarkably intolerant of dissenting views. This "chilling sameness of opinion" has paradoxically brought today's campuses closer to the antebellum era's dogmatism than to true pluralism.

In Kronman's view, none of this need have happened had the humanities been self-confident enough to resist. Instead, professors in the arts-and-letters tradition foolishly chose to cast aside their own creed of secular humanism and to embrace the research-driven approach that has increasingly become the main measure of success in U.S. higher education. Whatever the accomplishments of that model, Kronman writes, the values it promotes—original scholarly contributions above all else, academic specialization, and a downgrading of the value of teaching—have undermined the question of what life is really for, a question that can be pursued only by assuming "a stable repertoire of values that form a recurrent framework of choice in each generation."

THE UPSHOT is that while the natural and social sciences have flourished in the research-dominated world of today's universities, the humanities have lost both their bearings and their credibility. And yet, Kronman believes, they are needed today more than ever. Science may indeed be "the preeminent authority . . . of our age," but along with its ever-present and powerful companion, technology, it is inadequate to meet our increasingly urgent spiritual yearnings.

These yearnings have led some to join what Kronman calls "the rising tide of religious fundamentalism." But that is of no help, since every religion believes "there is only one right answer to life's meaning." Only a revival of the humanities,

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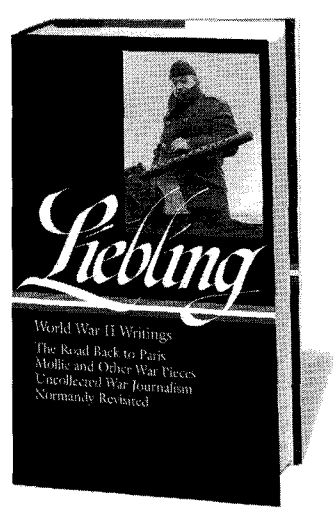

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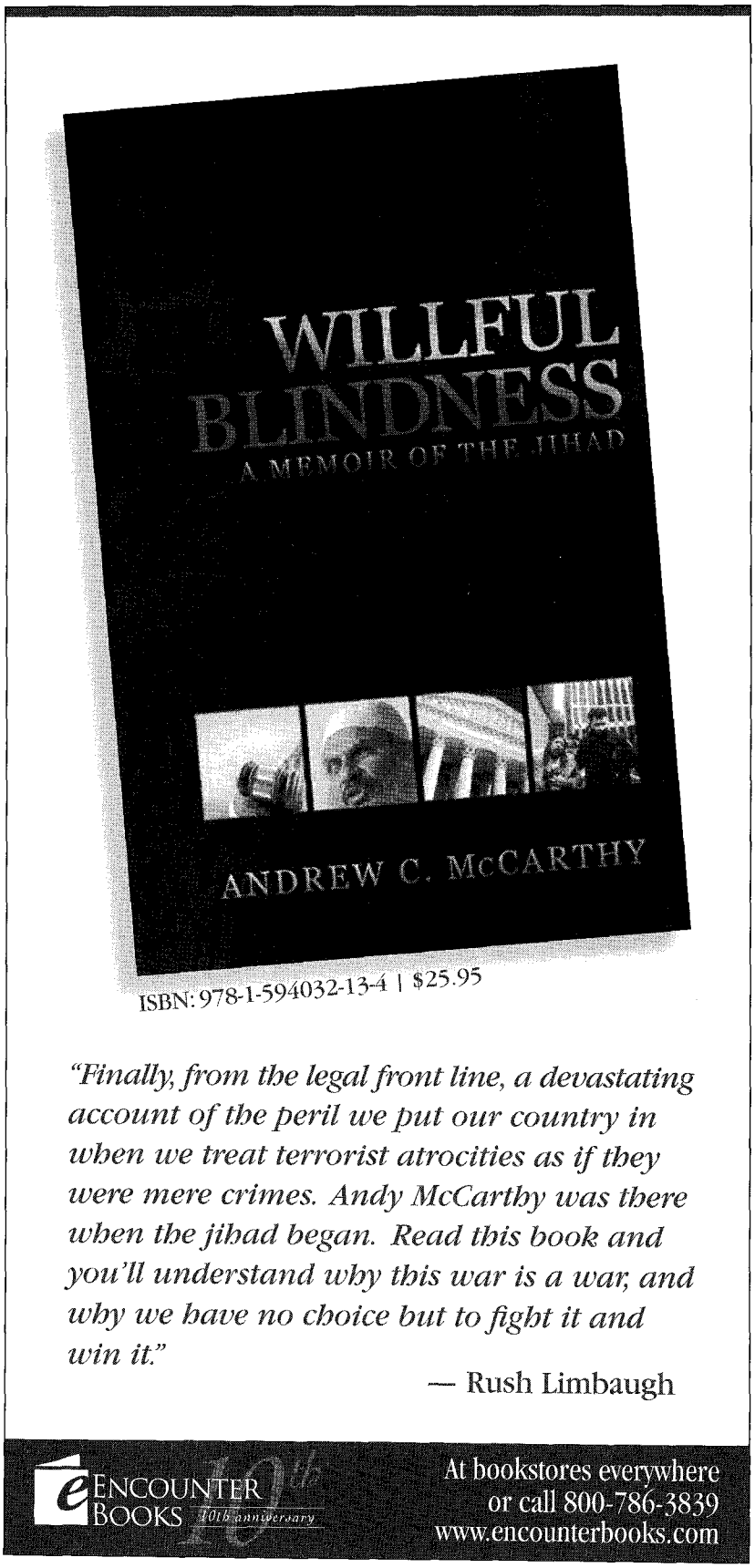
Kronman feels, can best feed the hunger he identifies.

Surprisingly, he is fairly optimistic about the prospects for such a revival. His grounds include, first, the growing currency of public debates with a spiritual dimension (about whether "intelligent design" should be taught as an alternative to evolution, for instance) and the accompanying desire among secular Americans for "a serious spirituality of a non-fundamentalist kind." He is also given hope by what he sees as the waning popularity of political correctness in American academic culture. Finally, he is persuaded that students and parents, fed up with the prospect of spending "four years sampling courses with little or no connection, moved by fancy and curiosity but guided by no common principle or theme," would be receptive to a renewed emphasis on life's great questions.

Were this to happen, Kronman asserts, colleges could once again assume spiritual leadership for the nation, steering a much-needed course between "the fundamentalists who invite us to give ourselves up" and the science "that invites us to forget who we are."

Even readers largely sympathetic to Kronman's brief for secular humanism might legitimately wonder whether his optimism is warranted. For one thing, having devoted a lengthy chapter to the rise of political correctness, he asserts in a single paragraph that it is on the decline. Maybe so, but he offers no evidence to buttress his assertion, and many critics of campus culture will no doubt contend that he is too sanguine. Nor does he seem to contemplate the possibility that, as the University of Virginia's Paul Cantor has observed, even the traditional canon can be warped beyond recognition by highly politicized instruction.

Kronman also surely overstates the desire among students and parents for a return to the classics. For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better or for worse, by far the most popular major among American undergraduates today is business. Nationwide, according to researchers at UCLA, the proportion of incoming undergraduates who say that "developing a meaningful philosophy of life" is either a very important or essential personal goal declined from 86 percent in 1967 to an all-time low of 39 percent in 2003. Although the figure has risen a bit since then, it is difficult, at a time when the nation has moved steadily toward mass access to higher education, to credit Kronman's assertion that large numbers of students yearn for Kierkegaard (though it would be nice if they did). Even at Yale, where appetite for the humanities tends to run strong, only a modest fraction of incoming freshmen participate in the college's well-regarded Directed Studies program, whose reading list forms an appendix to Kronman's book.

In that connection, *Education's End* would have benefited from a more systematic review and evaluation of other core-curriculum offerings around the nation. Kronman mentions a few—at Reed, St. Olaf's, and Columbia—but says almost nothing about them. And he is silent about Chicago, leaving readers to wonder whether this is an oversight or whether he implicitly agrees with alumni who grumble that the university's once-celebrated core has been watered down. Nor, oddly, does he mention St. John's, which offers perhaps the purest contemporary version of the arts-and-letters ideal at its campuses in Annapolis, Maryland, and Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Kronman is evidently not an empiricist at heart, and his book is admittedly less a practical handbook for change than an exercise in philosophical persuasion. In arguing for secularism he is, perhaps inevitably, rather hard on faith: is all religion really so unremittingly hostile to intellectual and pluralistic inquiry as he suggests? One wonders what Kronman-as-religion-critic would make of a Catholic Great Books program like that offered by California's Thomas Aquinas College. Does he think a serious Christian—or, for that matter, a serious Muslim or Jew—cannot participate fully in the life of the mind?

Yet, despite these shortcomings in *Education's End*, Kronman succeeds remarkably well, even movingly, in conveying the intellectual and spiritual joy that a serious student can find by participating in the "great conversation." He makes the case—a bit abstractly, but valuably—that undergraduates can and should learn how values like honor, beauty, justice, and equality apply to the lives they themselves wish to lead. And though he says little explicitly about citizenship, his spirited defense of the West against campus multiculturalists, combined with his recitation of the ways in which the great Western thinkers disagree with one another, conveys the distinct impression that, for him, civic engagement is at least an implicit goal of liberal education, if secondary to philosophical reflection.

Finally, while Kronman's sober volume could have been enlivened with more anecdote and illustration, his anguish over the plight of the humanities comes through with persuasive clarity. So does his fresh critique of the unanticipated damage wrought by the research model that undergirds today's universities. Whatever the triumphs of the natural and social sciences, Kronman reminds us, they cannot help us contend with some of the hardest questions we face in our own lives:

> For the humanities are the record of our encounter with mortality, and their common subject is the very thing that technology eclipses: the fateful limits that constrain our longing for control, and the pathos of yearning and defeat that colors all our human works.

However challenging the task, giving more undergraduates the tools to grapple with these fateful human limits is, without question, a worthy enterprise.

Working for Moscow

Seduced by Secrets:
Inside the Stasi's
Spy-Tech World

by Kristie Macrakis

Cambridge. 392 pp. $28.00

Reviewed by
Daniel Johnson

WHO'S AFRAID of Markus Wolf? When the East German spymaster died in 2006, few outside Germany remembered him except as the putative original for John le Carré's fictional Soviet villain Karla. Yet as last year's Oscar-winning movie *The Lives of Others* showed, the organization for which Wolf worked was no ordinary intelligence agency.

By the time it was wound up after German reunification in 1990, the Ministry for State Security, popularly known as the "Stasi," employed a staff of some 80,000. In a small country of 17 million, its presence was ubiquitous. Even today, eighteen years later, the Stasi still casts a long shadow over those who lived under its scrutiny for two generations in the now-defunct entity known as the German Democratic Republic (GDR).

Voltaire said of the Holy Roman Empire that it was neither holy, nor Roman, nor an empire. The GDR,

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DANIEL JOHNSON *is the editor of* Standpoint, *a new British magazine to be launched in June. The American edition of his book*, White King and Red Queen: How the Cold War Was Fought on the Chessboard, *is forthcoming from Houghton Mifflin.*

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set up by the Russians in 1949, was neither German, nor democratic, nor a republic. Because it was Soviet rather than German in its allegiance, a mere zone of occupation denied recognition by its West German counterpart, it lacked even the minimal patriotic legitimacy of the other Eastern European "people's republics." As a rump of the dismembered pre-World War II state of Prussia, it was totally dependent on Communism for its ideology, and hence even more despotic than other Soviet satellites.

To be sure, the GDR boasted the trappings of a democracy. There were "independent" political parties—Christian Democrats, Liberals, even Nationalists—alongside the "Socialist Unity party," as the Communists called themselves after "merging" with the pre-war Social Democrats. But these were mere front organizations, the tawdry façade of a ruthless dictatorship in which real power was increasingly exercised by the secret police—the Stasi, whose vast hierarchy of surveillance reached down into the populace and up to the pinnacle of the party. That is the subject of this informative new book.

The Stasi was largely the creation of one man: Erich Mielke. Like the young Stalin, Mielke had made his name as a Communist thug, fleeing Weimar Germany due to his part in the murder of two policemen and spending the Nazi era training at the Lenin school and in the service of the NKVD (forerunner of the KGB). At the end of the war, Mielke returned to Germany to clone Stalin's tyranny in the Soviet zone.

In 1947, Mielke set up an "intelligence and information department" under close Soviet control. Its task, he wrote, was "to know everything and to report everything worth knowing." Under his gimlet eye, the Stasi pursued its goal of knowing everything with the help of millions of informers (*Denunzianten*) who were seemingly only

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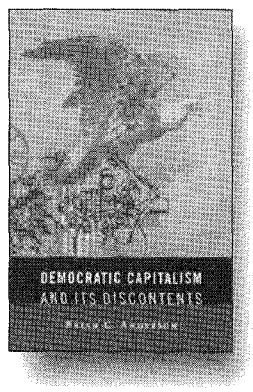

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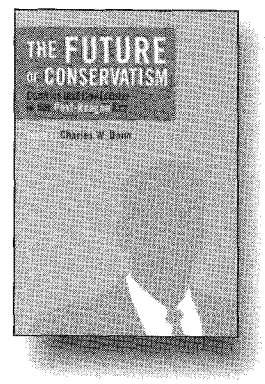

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too ready to denounce their neighbors, friends, lovers and families. Within a decade, Mielke became minister of state security, a post he retained until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

In practice, there was a great deal of continuity between the Nazi and Communist eras in the operation of the Stasi. Although former members of the Gestapo or other Nazi organizations were supposed to be excluded from all forms of police work, it was possible (in the words of the historian Norman Naimark) for "highly desirable ex-Nazis to continue their work." Thanks to the patronage of its comrades in the Kremlin, the Stasi was able to guard its independence from the rest of the state apparatus. And just as Mielke preserved his empire from encroachment by the interior ministry, Markus Wolf, the head of the Stasi's foreign-intelligence department, kept control of espionage out of the hands of the foreign ministry.

THROUGHOUT its history, as Kristie Macrakis shows in *Seduced by Secrets*, the Stasi worked as much for Moscow as for its nominal masters in East Berlin. Unlike, say, the Securitate in Romania, which was dedicated mostly to crushing opposition to the dictator Nicolai Ceausescu, the Stasi was in the vanguard of the Soviet-led effort to penetrate, thwart, confuse, subvert, and plunder the West. The Stasi also trained and supported terrorists, including various Arab groups and the Baader Meinhof gang or Red Army faction that mounted a twenty-year campaign against West German, American, and other NATO targets.

To accomplish this ambitious and destructive program, the Stasi devoted vast resources to creating or stealing the science and technology it needed. Successful intelligence always depends on maintaining a technological edge, but during the cold war the Communist secret services became obsessed with the paraphernalia of espionage and surveillance. What Macrakis shows is that the Stasi's fixation on the tools of its murky trade eventually became an end in itself, absorbing manpower and expertise on a scale far beyond the requirements of national security.

Macrakis, who teaches history at Michigan State University, has spent many years investigating the Stasi files, interviewing its former agents and officials and recreating its peculiar subculture of gadgetry and treachery. Her book is divided into two parts: the first dealing with attempts to steal or smuggle sophisticated technology from the West, the second with the Stasi's use of listening devices, secret writing, observation and photography, "smell science," and the like in pursuit of its aims. Macrakis calls this, aptly, "James Bond, Communist-style."

A single example of the way the Stasi operated: when the dissident singer and poet Wolf Biermann was deported to the West in 1976, protesters distributed 500 leaflets in mailboxes. Over the next six months, the Stasi tested some 10,000 suspects for both fingerprint and smell matches. Using highly trained dogs, the Stasi would match up traces of smells left on the leaflets with samples taken from suspects, sometimes using a special "scent chair" for the purpose. Eventually one of the authors of the leaflets was identified and convicted on evidence gathered in this way.

AS MACRAKIS shows, much of the foreign espionage carried out by the Stasi was aimed at stealing the means to feed its obsession with technology. On occasion it succeeded. In the files, Macrakis found the story of one Agent Gorbachev, alias Hans Rehder. A former Nazi, Rehder posed as a corporate manager in West Germany, supplying

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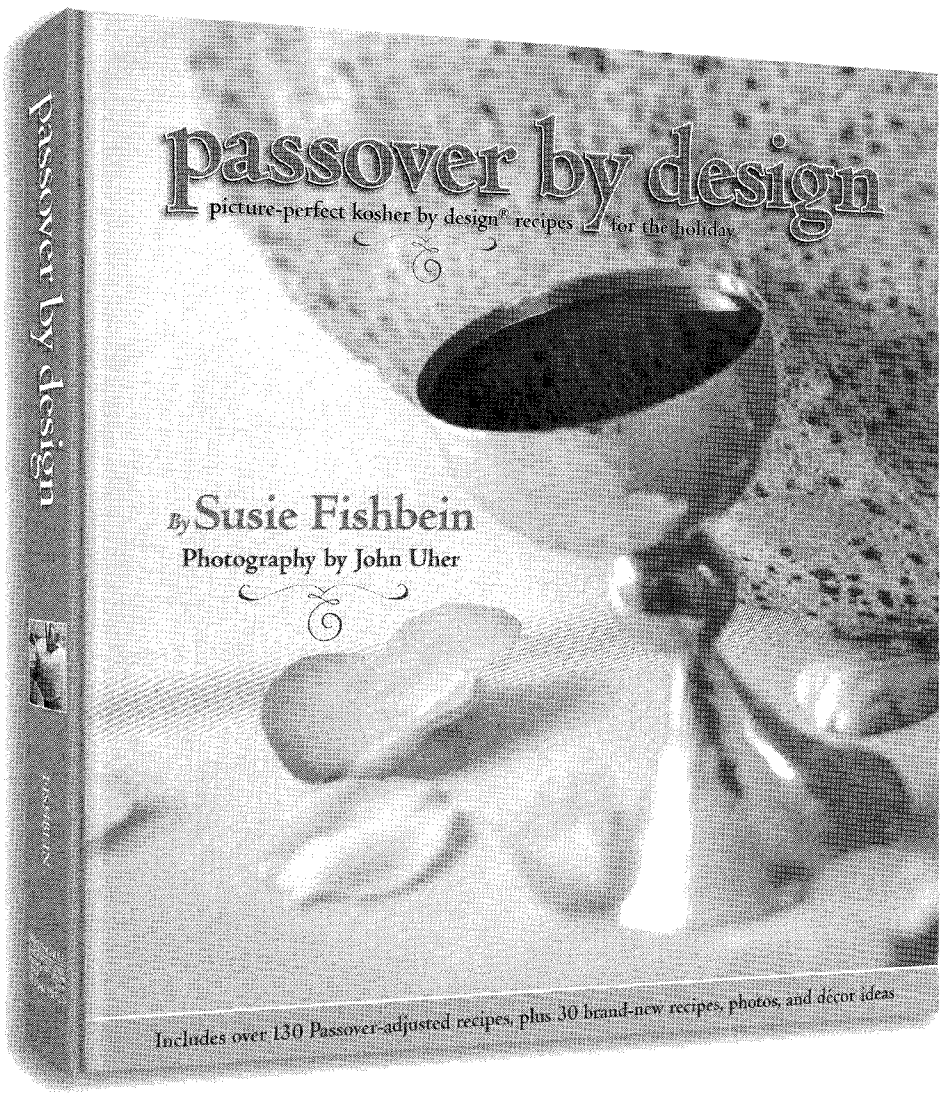
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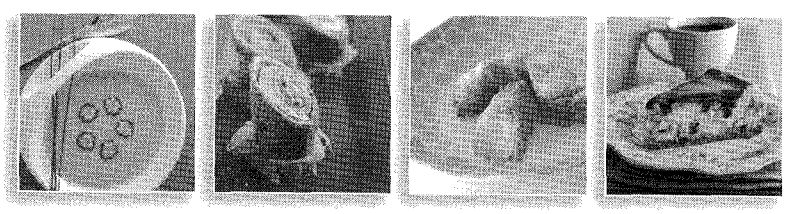

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the Stasi with vast quantities of information from his employers, Telefunken and AEG.

But the Stasi's overall record in industrial espionage was poor, and even when it succeeded it was sometimes unable to turn the results to useful effect. In the 1980's, Macrakis writes, it could not overcome the embargo imposed by President Reagan on the transfer of sensitive technology, including computers, to the eastern bloc. Although it devoted a significant proportion of the Western currency at the disposal of the East German regime to bribing Western corporations, the Stasi failed to enable the GDR to mass-produce the vital computer technology it needed. The one-megabyte chip that the Communist party boss Erich Honecker proudly showed Mikhail Gorbachev in 1986 was merely a dummy.

By the time Honecker fell, such chips had yet to be made in his factories. Sometimes the equipment needed to reproduce high-tech marvels like these was sabotaged by Western spy agencies; often the Stasi was swindled by the smugglers it had expensively paid to acquire the needed machinery.

Seduced by Secrets makes a significant contribution to our knowledge of how the Stasi did what it did—and, its bumblings and failures aside, Macrakis leaves no doubt that it often did what it did brilliantly. She is less interested in the question of *why* such a monstrous organization came into being at all. As she interviews witnesses or examines the sites and scenes of Stasi exploits, she warns: "I make no moral commentary about what I witness." Still, her book does have a moral, and one that she intends to be of relevance to our current war on terror.

Macrakis's analysis of the Stasi mindset leads her to conclude that its "obsessive secrecy" grew out of the "closed Soviet society and the Communist conspiratorial zeal to create a new society." But she also argues that analogies can be drawn with U.S. government experiments during the cold war, including the many secret tests to discover the effects of plutonium radiation or the CIA's use of mind-altering drugs like LSD.

Both sides, Macrakis writes, "blindly believed in the power of science or technology to solve social or intelligence problems." Moreover, in fighting today's war, in which spying has become a "dominant tool," Americans "have continued to place "more faith in the power of technological espionage than any country in the world. Perhaps," Macrakis concludes, "it is time to rethink that strategy."

Yet the cold war was not fought with the sort of moral symmetry that Macrakis's comparison implies, and neither is our present war. It is true that Western intelligence agencies sometimes behaved unethically—and still do. But these have been rare aberrations that have occurred under the exigencies of often merciless conflict.

By contrast, the Stasi's entire *raison d'être* was the perpetuation of a tyrannical regime, and all its technical ingenuity was subordinated to perverse, even diabolical purposes. It is not enough to say that "I make no moral commentary." The truth to which this book bears witness is that the Stasi served an evil system deploying every ounce of its ingenuity to crush the human spirit.

BY THE TIME the Berlin Wall fell, the technology gap between East and West had long since become unbridgeable. Yet, however quaint the Stasi's gadgets may appear today, its foreign arm, under Markus Wolf, had indeed been uniquely successful in penetrating an important Western state—namely, the German Federal Republic—from top to bottom. Soon after the Wall opened, the CIA seized the files (the "crown jewels") of Wolf's department. As Macrakis shows, they revealed that half the Stasi agents worked in science and technology.

Nor, to repeat, was East Germany the main beneficiary of their expertise. That was always the Soviet Union. Today, too, Russia maintains a huge number of spies in the West, most of whom are engaged in the same kind of technological, scientific, and industrial espionage as their predecessors. The man who now rules Russia was, in 1989, a KGB colonel based in Germany, working closely with the Stasi. If there is a figure on the world stage today who is as dangerously deluded as were his East German collaborators, it is Vladimir Putin.

Undoing the Jewish State

The Hebrew Republic: How Secular Democracy and Global Enterprise Will Bring Israel Peace at Last

by Bernard Avishai

Current Affairs. 304 pp. $26.00

Reviewed by
David Billet

IN A PREVIOUS book, *The Tragedy of Zionism* (1985), the business journalist Bernard Avishai recounted his excitement as a sensitive Jewish youth from Montreal visiting Israel for the first time shortly after the 1967 Six-Day war. There he saw "the promise of an authenticity [that] North American Jews seemed to lack. In Israel . . . there was no 'alienation.'" Five years later, he moved to Jerusalem with his new wife.

But "alienation" found them after all. Before long, the two discovered that integrating into Israeli society entailed a kind of "cultural enslavement": their native "English spirit" had to be effaced by Hebrew,

DAVID BILLET *is the assistant editor of* COMMENTARY.

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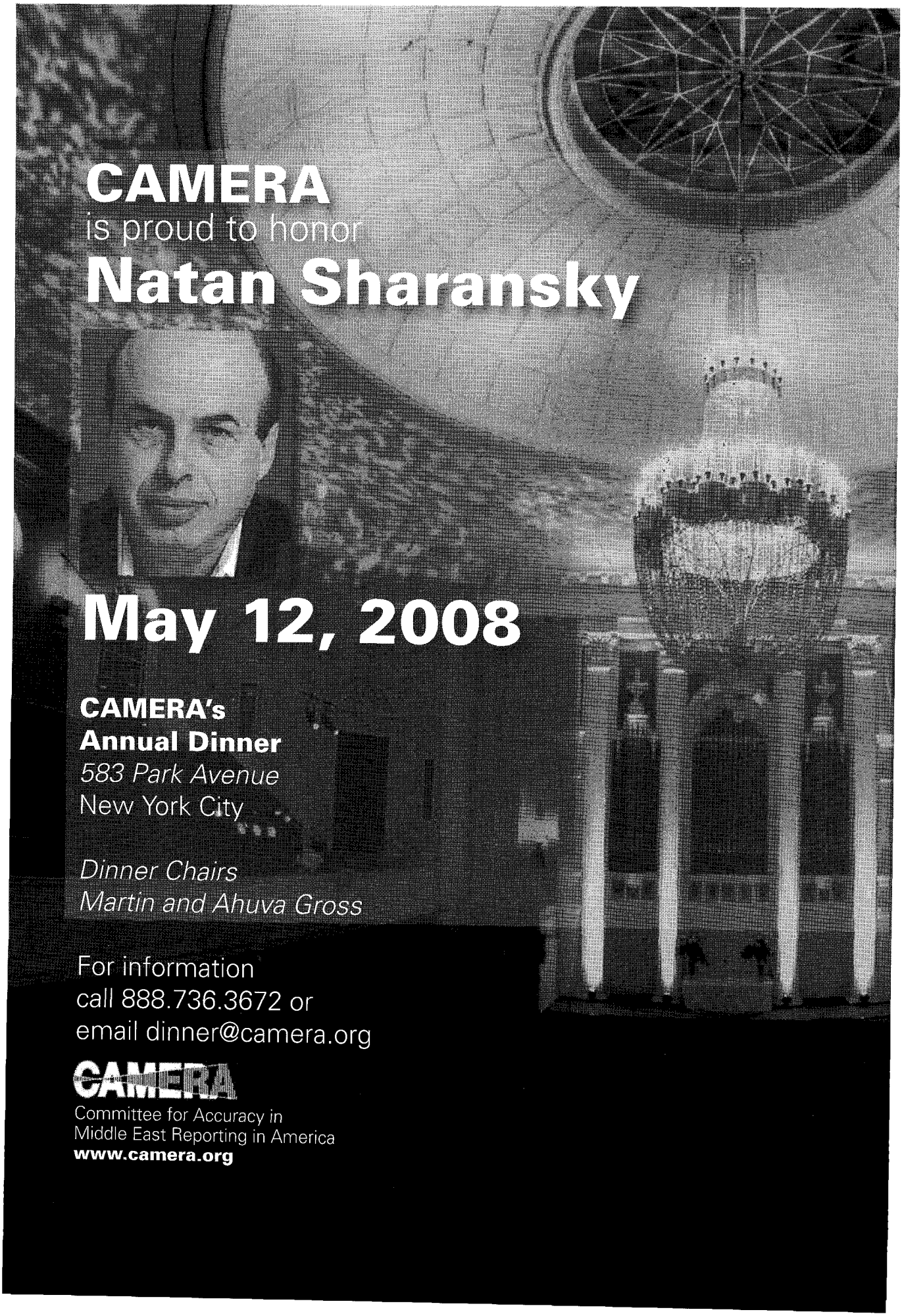

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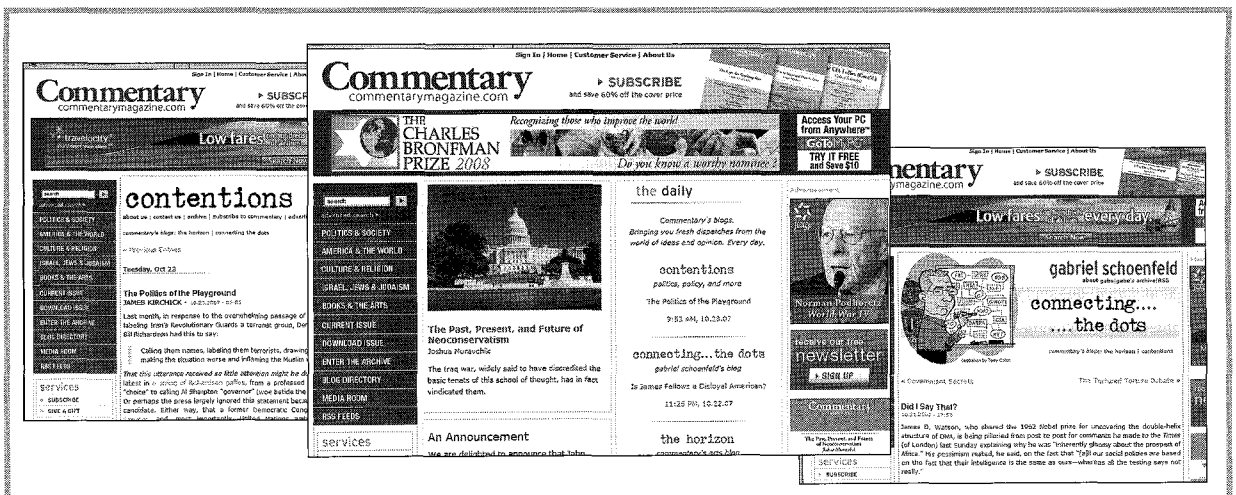
and their secular, North American-style Jewishness did little to ease things. Eventually, they made their way back to Montreal.

Reflecting on his experience in that earlier book, Avishai traced the arc of Zionist ideas from their conception in 19th-century Eastern Europe to their application in the politics and culture of late-20th-century Israel. Zionism, he concluded, had been a "good revolution," but had "run its course." Besides making false promises to Jews about the cultural benefits of homecoming, Zionist Israel had "stopped short of its liberal-democratic goals" by denying full privileges to its Arab citizens. The state's founding ideal was not able to guide the actually existing society—thus the tragedy.

The present book brings Avishai's old thesis up to date and to its natural conclusion. In 2002, he relates, he returned for a second go at life in Israel, residing part time in Jerusalem and teaching at an elite business school near Tel Aviv. Although newly receptive to the charms of Hebrew (at least in the form of what one of his interlocutors calls the "juicy, delicious" argot spoken by with-it Israelis, "all about going out and getting laid"), he nevertheless finds Zionism itself to be no longer a mere tragedy but an increasingly urgent "disaster." The collapse of the Oslo peace process, the second *intifada*, the ascent of Hamas, the war in Lebanon, and the aftermath of the disengagement from Gaza have cemented among Israeli Jews a view of Arabs as implacable foes. To his dismay, Avishai reports, even many of his leftist friends feel that fixing the deficiencies of Israeli democracy can be put off until the day that peace with the Arabs arrives.

But Avishai holds to the contrary proposition. Israel's glaring democratic deficit is, for him, the root of its security problem, and must be addressed if the country is ever to fulfill its early promise, let alone stop what he sees as its slide toward the logic of ethnic cleansing. Hence this manifesto for the nation's makeover: from a Jewish state to a "Hebrew republic."

FOR AVISHAI, the trouble with Israel set in early on—when, for the sake of a coalition in the Knesset, the country's very first government abandoned its constitutional project and handed over control of Jewish religious affairs to the (Orthodox) chief rabbinate. In the ensuing decades, laws would be passed guaranteeing universal human rights, but never would the inherent tension be resolved between the Jewish and democratic identities of the state. In privileging the Jewish ele-



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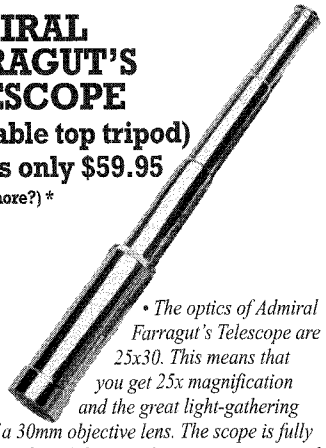

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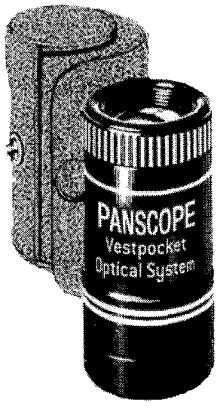

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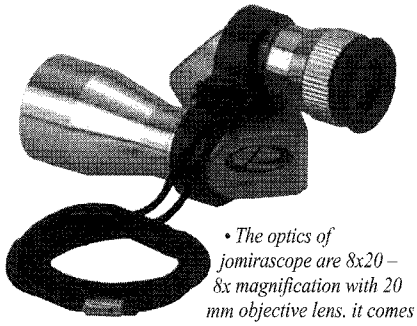

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ment, and in making the rabbinate the steward of Judaism, Israel necessarily devalued that which was secular or non-Jewish.

In practice, Avishai writes, this legal muddle has yielded many injustices. Israeli Arabs, for example, do not enjoy the same entitlements as Jews when it comes to the allocation of public lands for housing and development; they are poorer, and suffer from inferior infrastructure and services; private discrimination against them is commonplace. In addition, the absence of a true separation between religion and state means that there is no civil marriage in Israel, and Jewish weddings (and funerals) must be presided over by officials of the rabbinate. By far the most egregious expression of Jewish privilege is the 1950 Law of Return, which grants immediate citizenship to any immigrant who can claim a Jewish heritage.

According to Avishai, the spearhead of this corrosively Judeocentric Zionism has been the settler movement, which espouses an exclusivist ideology and has absorbed an enormous slice of state resources into its project of building Jewish villages in the occupied West Bank, indifferent to the rights of the Palestinians and the real security needs of the state. But the settlers are only one subset of Israel's religious community, which is growing in numbers and political power and which views democracy in terms of what it can get away with. No less vexing, even secular Israelis are oblivious of the extent to which their own favored status derives from the original ethos of Zionism, with its preferential discrimination in favor of Jews.

Given the deep roots of Israel's democracy problem, how, then, can the country be "brought up to code"? Avishai outlines the requisite process: Israel must withdraw from the West Bank and recognize a Palestinian state that will enjoy a federal arrangement with it; privatize all public land, repeal the Law of Return, and disband the state's religious apparatus; and enact a formal constitution mandating a single standard of citizenship based on residency and minimal literacy in Hebrew. Certain accommodations for the Jewish majority might remain in place—a Saturday day of rest, landed-immigrant status for refugees from anti-Semitism, the Star of David as one state symbol among others—but in most key respects the country would be a secular democracy like any other.

Generally speaking, this program resembles the one advocated by fringe elements of the Israeli Left and its Diaspora apostles, with their call for redefining Israel as a "state of all its citizens." The nuance is that Avishai sees a way for the necessary political transformation to be effected through economic means. As against those like former finance minister Benjamin Netanyahu who (he says) think that Israel's flourishing information economy can continue to grow even in the absence of peace, Avishai insists that reconciliation with the Arabs is vital if Israeli businesses are to continue to attract capital and managers and keep their plants running at full speed. The needs of Israel's new centrist elite of entrepreneurs and global businessmen, in other words, can power a movement aimed at junking the present state model and creating in its place a prosperous, peaceful, secular, federated Israel-Palestine.

BERNARD AVISHAI is hardly the first to argue for the economic "dividends" of peace. This was Shimon Peres's thesis in *The New Middle East* (1993), his utopian apologia for the Oslo process. The trouble was that not everyone followed the script by agreeing to trade swords for ploughshares. Nor has anything changed materially in the interim. Given a choice between voting their pocketbooks and voting for war, Palestinians continue to be beguiled by the dream of eliminating Israel from the physical map as thoroughly as it is already eliminated from the maps displayed in their schoolrooms. There is nothing Israel's entrepreneurs can do about this, and it is a safe bet that, in contrast to Avishai, most of them know it.

No less cockeyed is Avishai's diagnosis of Israel's political culture. Israel is hardly the only democratic nation without a constitution—England lacks one, and England has a state church to boot. In contrast to most other nations, moreover, whose identity was set in place by a dominant culture and was maintained in the past by state power, Israel's anomalies, such as they are, have arisen out of the give-and-take of political differences, compromises, and coalition-building, with many competing factions struggling to have their say. Liberal and pluralistic from the start, Jewish society in Israel has always featured a large, thriving secular sphere alongside the religious one, and in addition the state's laws assiduously protect both the institutions and the free practice of Christianity, Islam, and other faiths. Every nation has its own characteristics: why should the democratic Jewish state not be permitted its own?

In his ire at Israel's religious Jews, Avishai makes all manner of unsubstantiated claims about them. Their commitment to democracy is, he asserts, opportunistic; they engage in voter fraud, shirk taxes, justify male brutality against women, admire "obscure" rabbis, engage in "bizarre" rituals, are raised on hatred of the *goy*. Their eyes "burn through you." Several times he entertains the notion that Judaism is a racist and even a blood religion. Although he records conversations with Arabs whom he describes in the most ingratiating terms, Avishai was evidently unable to locate, within the highly variegated world of Jewish religious life in Israel, a single Jew worthy of his respect with whom to converse seriously.

Then there are Israel's Arabs.

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Turmoil in Gaza

What can the world, what can Israel do to restore order?

About two years ago, yielding to the pressure of "world opinion," Israel decided to abandon Gaza and to withdraw the about 8,000 Israelis who had lived there for generations and who had created flourishing agriculture and successful industry.

What are the facts?

Israel's trial balloon. For Israelis, the abandonment of Gaza was also a trial balloon to assess what the relationship with a nascent Palestinian state would be. They got a quick and decisive answer. Almost from the very first day of their "liberation," the Gazans launched daily rocket attacks on Israel. Fortunately, so far "only" about fifteen people have been killed and "only" about 300 injured by those relatively unsophisticated weapons. But it is only a matter of time until one of those rockets – whose range and effectiveness are being constantly improved – hits a school, a large housing complex or a hospital.

In the meantime, Israel responds with pinpoint volleys on the launching pads of those rockets. But they are easily movable and purposely located in heavily populated neighborhoods. It is thanks only to Israeli respect for human life that tens of thousands of Gazans have not perished in Israel's response to those barrages. We must ask ourselves what our country would do if Mexico were to launch thousands of rockets into San Diego. The answer is perfectly clear: We would retaliate in full force.

> "Israel will think more than twice before turning Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") over to the Palestinians."

A wall forms the border between the Gaza Strip and Egypt. It is lightly guarded by Egyptian troops. The terrorist Hamas government decided to breach this wall and tens of thousands of Gazans burst into the Egyptian Sinai. The wall has now been rebuilt and most of the Gazans have been returned to their territory. Some, however, are still roaming the Sinai and have committed suicide attacks on Israeli citizens.

Gaza in misery. The situation in Gaza is indeed miserable. That is not the fault of the Israelis, but the fault of the Gazans/Palestinians themselves. In 1948, the UN proposed that "Palestine" be divided into an Arab and into a Jewish sector, with Jerusalem becoming an "internationalized" city. The Jews reluctantly accepted this partition plan. The Arabs rejected it out of hand and invaded the newly-born Jewish state with the armies of six nations. Had the Arabs accepted the partition plan or any of the many Israeli offers of conciliation, they would now have had their own state for sixty years and would enjoy prosperity and economic success just as Israel. Instead, focused exclusively on the destruction of Israel and the killing of the hated Jews, Gazans are living in misery, totally depending on the dole of Israel and on the support of the world.

Rather than bombing Gaza in response to the daily barrages of rockets, Israel has responded and is so far continuing to respond by selectively withholding economic support for Gaza. Although Israel allows the importation of essential foods and medical supplies, it has curtailed the importation of gasoline, diesel fuel and electricity. The world is outraged, but it is as humane a response as possible to the incessant shelling of Israeli cities.

Constant smuggling of arms. Even under the supposedly watchful eyes of the Egyptians, scores of tunnels from Egypt into Gaza have been constructed. High-power explosives and advanced weapons are daily smuggled through these tunnels into Gaza. They are supplied and paid for primarily by Iran, which is closely allied to Gaza's Hamas terrorist government. One wonders why these tunnels are not being used to import food, fuel, medicine and clothing, rather than weapons. Also, why should Israel be responsible for the supplying of Gaza? There are no good answers to these questions.

When the Jews evacuated Gaza, they left hundreds of beautiful homes behind. The Gazans destroyed them. They were going to build highrises instead. In the more than two years since the Israelis left, not a single brick has been laid. The Gazans destroyed and plundered the sophisticated and fully computerized greenhouse installations that the Jews had left behind. They were worth millions of dollars, could have produced food for the residents and millions of dollars in yearly revenue for the impoverished territory.

It is said that one of the reasons for Gaza's misery is that it is so densely populated. Yet, Singapore, for instance, and Hong Kong are much more densely populated than Gaza. But the comparison to Singapore is significant. It, too, is densely populated, is bordered by an unfriendly neighbor, and has been devastated by war. Today, Singapore is an oasis of prosperity, a bustling center of financial and economic activity. Gaza, with the unstinting help of Israel and with the billions of dollars that the world community has poured into it, could also be such an oasis of peace and prosperity instead of the hovel of misery and decay and the cauldron of violence that it is today.

The withdrawal-from-Gaza experiment did not work. Gazans destroyed the infrastructure and the basis for prosperity that Israel left in the territory. If, instead of being singlemindedly focused on lobbing rockets into Israel, it would have concentrated on peace and on sound development, Gaza could today be on the road to being another Singapore. But Gazans threw away that opportunity. What is more, having had the very bad experience with Gaza, Israel will think more than twice before turning Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") over to the Palestinians. Israel – its people, its cities, its airports and its industrial and military infrastructure – would be under the guns of those who are sworn to destroy it.

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From the founding of the state, Arabs in Israel have voted in elections and served in the Knesset. The Arab community has its own school system, its own official day of rest, and its own language. It benefits from an affirmative-action policy in government hiring, enjoys the protections of the Supreme Court, and is exempted from military service lest Arabs have to take up arms against other Arabs. (To his credit, Avishai wants all citizens of his imagined republic to perform a term of national service; if a recent *Haaretz* survey is to be believed, so do a significant number of Israeli Arabs today.)

There is certainly a measure of discrimination against Arabs in Israel—what minority in any country is not subject to discrimination?—but the larger point, elided by Avishai, concerns what the Arabs have failed to do for themselves. A group consisting of 10 percent of the population, and tending to vote as a bloc, Israel's Arabs could be the kingmakers of Israeli politics, especially in light of the power commanded by small parties in Israel's parliamentary system. But instead of building alliances, most Arab politicians have invested their energies in demagogic Israel-bashing, thereby simultaneously disserving the interests of their constituents and making themselves untouchable by any potential Jewish ally.

As for Avishai's despised Law of Return, it was enacted, as he acknowledges, in the wake of the Holocaust, to guarantee the protection that the democracies of Europe were unable or unwilling to afford their Jews. It also positively affirmed the existence of a historical Jewish people and its right to a state in the Jewish homeland. As such it is a badge of national honor.

But Avishai has little use for these building blocks of Jewish identity. He has, indeed, nothing to say about the Jews' historical association with the land of Israel going back to the Bible, or about the specifically Jewish ideas that informed the Zionist calculus. When he talks about anti-Semitism ("allegedly still found in Gentile countries"), he is at pains to minimize its existence or to define it as another propaganda tool in the arsenal of Zionists who have "counted on Gentile majorities to make Jewish minorities feel, if not illegal, then vaguely unwelcome." He is also capable of blaming anti-Semitism on the Jews themselves: both the recent calls in the West for boycotting Israeli academic institutions and the steady sale among Arabs of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* must be seen, he says, in the context of "televised scenes of [Israeli] occupation over a period of 40 years."

EVEN AS he hammers away at the state and people of Israel for their ingrained anti-Arab prejudices, Avishai never, ever assumes that the future Palestinian state of his imagining will begin life as anything but *judenrein*. So much for democratic consistency. And what of the state to the west of the Palestinians? With most of its defining Jewish element forgone, what remains in Avishai's roseate view will be the commerce and culture of what he calls Greater Tel Aviv, whose "cosmopolitan economic and intellectual power reduces to insignificance any fight over tracts of land." Well, Greater Tel Aviv is also a tract of land, and one can readily imagine a party happy to take it off the hands of a "republic" too cosmopolitan to trouble fighting for it.

In recent years, and in the face of a ferocious international movement to delegitimize the Jewish state, a little industry has sprung up among some Jewish intellectuals to question the need for the state's existence in the first place and to dream up an alternative that will remove this evident thorn from their personal and ideological comfort zones. To the names of Noam Chomsky, Tony Judt, and others can be added that of Bernard Avishai, still yearning, like that 60's Montreal adolescent, for the heaven of "authenticity," and cursing the Jews who have wickedly deprived him of it.

We mourn the death of

Robert Jastrow

1925-2008

Scientist, philosopher, contributor, friend.

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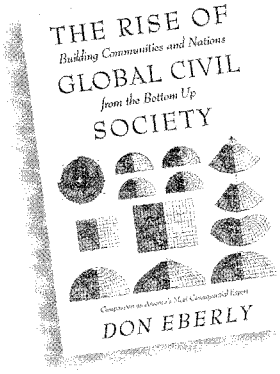

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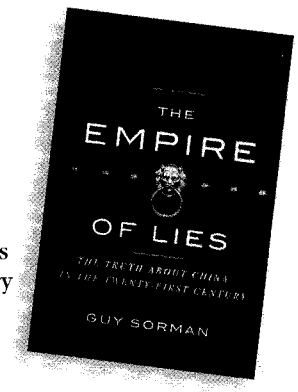

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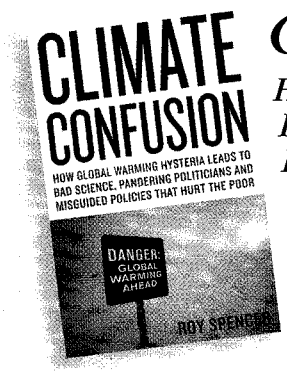

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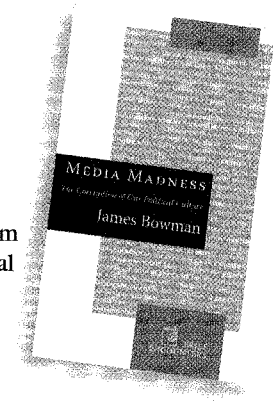

Media Madness is a scintillating and fast-paced anatomy of the mainstream media's governing myths and its self-generated demise. With acerbic wit, James Bowman reveals how the mainstream media's embrace of a spurious notion of objectivity, combined with its addiction to scandal, moral equivalence and an unshakable conviction of its own moral superiority have done irreparable damage to the media's public authority. This decline, argues Bowman, has precipitated a world-wide exodus to the "blogosphere" and alternative sources of news and comment.

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